

# **Socialism and Education in Britain 1883 -1902**

**by**

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the policies of the socialist movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century with regard to the education of children. This study is used to both reassess the nature of these education policies and to criticise the validity of the historiographical models of the movement employed by others.

This study is thematic and examines the whole socialist movement of the period, rather than a party or an individual and as such draws out the common policies and positions shared across the movement. The most central of these was a belief that progress in what was called the 'moral' and the 'material' must occur simultaneously. Neither the ethical transformation of individuals, nor, the material reformation of society alone would give real progress. Children, for example, needed to be fed as well as educated if the socialist belief in the power of education and the innate goodness of humanity was to be realised. This belief in the unity of moral and material reform effected all socialist policies studied here, such as those towards the family, teachers, and the content of the curriculum.

The socialist programme was also heavily centred on the direct democratic control of the education system, the ideal type of which actually existed in this period in the form of school boards. The socialist programme was thus not a utopian wish list but rather was capable of realisation through the forms of the state education machinery that were present in the period. It is argued in this thesis that the removal of this democratic machinery in 1902 crucially de-stabilised this unity of the ethical and the material and was one of the factors that led to the growth of state-centred and bureaucratic socialist solutions.

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# INTRODUCTION

## The character of socialism, the socialism of character?

Socialism must attack all social evil, all moral wrong, and put an end not only to the exploitation of man, to oppression and iniquity, but also to egoisms, to hardships, to all avoidable suffering, must be inspired by every noble inspiration ... Do not therefore let us repel that which is most irrepressible, that which is best in human nature - sentiment, if thus you choose to call the ideal. ... Realist and idealist, both are welcome in our ranks. If well they learn the message of socialism to all those who suffer, to all those who hope, the idealist will recognise the economic, the realist the human question, and the two will be made one.

J. Hunter Watts, 'Socialism, Idealist and Realist', *Justice*, 19 Nov. 1892.

It would probably be quite difficult to underestimate the importance of education as a social and political issue in Britain in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Frederick James Gould, whose work features in this thesis, observed in 1890 "this age is characterised by an extraordinary enthusiasm for education."<sup>1</sup> The socialism that grew up in this society both imbibed and developed this concern and it was thus not surprising that education occupied the key position in the triptych socialist slogan 'Educate, Agitate, Organise'. In this phrase, which occurred repeatedly in the literature of the period, education could have two meanings. It could imply propaganda amongst adult workers but equally often, if not indeed more commonly, it could refer to the education of children. It is this second use of the term that will be examined in this thesis.

The education of children was described by one author in Keir Hardie's paper, *The Labour Leader*, as "the crux of the social problem" and by another in *Justice*, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.), as "a sacred cause".<sup>2</sup> Socialism in this period was highly rational and had as one of its cornerstones the belief that ignorance was the lifeblood of the

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<sup>1</sup> Gould, 'The Noble Path', in, Gould, *Stepping Stones to Agnosticism*, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Compo, 'Child Labour', *The Labour Leader*, 28 July 1900. 'Socialism and the School Board', *Justice*, 27 Oct. 1894.

conservatism of the British workers and, as a corollary of this, that knowledge would lead to radicalism. J. Hunter Watts phrased this thus: “we have a large faith in human kind and believe that a generation of men and women whose physical and intellectual capacities have been fully developed in youth will soon sweep this foul society into the limbo of dead things, and ... will establish socialism.”<sup>1</sup>

Education was thus central to socialism in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The reviewer of William Morris’s *News From Nowhere* in *Seed-time*, the journal of the Fellowship of the New Life, wrote that, “in truth educational reform is so dependent upon social reform that the two cannot be considered apart.”<sup>2</sup> This means that education is an extremely useful means to highlight the ideas and politics of the movement as a whole. Therefore, it is argued that this thesis will be able to evaluate critically the conclusions of general histories of socialism, and general histories that comment upon socialism, as well as histories of socialist education policy.

In this latter group the path-breaking work of Brian Simon is pre-eminent. His *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*, published in 1965, is a milestone in the field. The work’s primary focus is upon organisations and parties and their struggle to gain access to state-funded education. In this sense then this work bears the imprint of the concerns of its time and of its author’s tireless advocacy of the comprehensivisation of British education. It is also worth noting that the eponymous grouping of ‘The Labour Movement’ does little to bring out differences within socialism, or between socialists and others.

Simon makes numerous references to William McCann’s 1960 University of Manchester thesis *Trade Unionist, Co-Operative and Socialist Organisations in Relation to Popular Education 1870-1902*, which is similarly dated. McCann argued that socialist educational demands “were quite capable of realisation without any fundamental change in the social structure.”<sup>3</sup> However, this was not the view of socialists at the time. The

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<sup>1</sup> J. Hunter Watts, *State Maintenance*, 10. See also, ‘The Battle Against Ignorance’, *Justice*, 9 May 1892. Annie Besant, ‘Free Education and Free Maintenance’, *Justice*, 10 Aug. 1889. James Keir Hardie, ‘About Education and Dividends’, *The Labour Leader*, 6 July 1901. John Ward, ‘Technical Education’, *Justice*, 18 Feb. 1888. Stewart Headlam, *Socialism and Religion*, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Perceval Chubb, ‘Morris’s Dip into the Future’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1891.

<sup>3</sup> W.P. McCann, *Trade Unionist, Co-operative and Socialist Organisations in Relation to Popular Education 1870-1902*, 197.

review of *News From Nowhere*, (quoted above) continued “and Morris’s wise word to those who would mend our educational faults is that they must perforce mend our whole social economy.”<sup>1</sup> It is likely that McCann was able to reach his conclusion because his overall project seems to have been not to outline and discuss the policies of socialists of the time, but rather to trace the antecedents of compulsory education as part of the growth of state welfarism. In so doing he has credited certain groups and individuals, whose policies seem to have since come to fruition, with a contemporary influence that is unjustified and distorting. In particular he eulogises the Fabian Society and, in his words, its “supreme exponent”<sup>2</sup> Sidney Webb. “During the years from about 1888 to 1894, in fact, Fabian policies and programmes on education were outstanding among those of the Labour movement in their scope and comprehensiveness.”<sup>3</sup> The rather pedestrian Fabian pamphlet, *Questions for School Board Candidates*, for example, was described by McCann as “another landmark in the educational history of the Labour movement; it provided a mine of ideas for socialists and Labour candidates during the following decade and directed much of their thinking.”<sup>4</sup> This thesis intends to argue that these conclusions about the unthreatening nature of socialist plans for education and the contemporary influence of Webb’s Fabianism are mistaken.

The temporal boundaries of McCann’s period of study are marked by two Education Acts. Conventional studies of socialism or the labour movement often select a date in the 1880s (the formation of the S.D.F. in 1884, or the great dock strike of 1889, for example,) as a starting point and a date somewhere round the First World War or the General Strike as a cut off point. This thesis combines the two fields of study and begins in 1884 with the foundation of the S.D.F. and ends with the 1902 Education Act. Mark Bevir’s work<sup>5</sup> has indicated how the formation of the S.D.F. was in part a transition from previously existing forms of popular democratic agitation and much less of a bolt from the blue than it may appear when it is selected as a starting date for a survey of socialism. Nonetheless, the fact that this

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<sup>1</sup> Perceval Chubb, ‘Morris’s dip into the future’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1891.

<sup>2</sup> W.P. McCann, *Trade Unionist, Co-operative and Socialist Organisations in Relation to Popular Education 1870-1902*, 221.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 224.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 231. It is notable that McCann does not give one example of the influence of this tract. I have been unable to find a single reference made to it in the socialist literature of the period that merits this praise though examples of attacks on Webb, Wallas and other Fabian leaders abound. See, for example, H.W. Hobart, ‘Education IV - Technical’, *Justice*, 21 July 1894, and especially, chapter 6, below.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Bevir, ‘The British Social Democratic Federation 1880-1885. From O’Brienism to Marxism’, *International Review of Social History*, vol. 37, 1992.

date has been so selected means that the period after 1884 has received a good deal of attention from other historians. It is to comment upon these, rather than to disparage continuities with earlier movements, that this study begins in 1884.

In contrast with the 18 years that led up to it, the significance of the 1902 Education Act for socialist education, and indeed for socialism in general, has not been explored even in Brian Simon's works where its detrimental effects on British education have been correctly detailed.<sup>1</sup> Ian Bullock and Logie Barrow's recent work, *Democratic Ideas in the British Labour Movement 1880-1914*, explores the all but forgotten political imperative for direct democracy in the movement and as such presents some of the debates round this legislation. However, the nature of their work is such that they ignore the educational aspects of this legislation and, moreover, they do not draw out the full implications of this act for socialism and its educational policies.

There are, of course, other historians of socialist education. But authors such as Rodney Barker and Martin Lawn<sup>2</sup> both begin their studies in 1900 which means that the bulk of their arguments fall outside the period under consideration here. However, it is in the nature of things that they make some reference to the two decades that precede their main focus. These mentions are dealt with below in chapters two, (Lawn), five and six (Barker).

Most historians follow contemporaries like Joseph Clayton, one time secretary of the Leeds Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.), in accepting that there was something different about socialism as it was practised in Britain at the turn of the last century. Attempts to explain this difference have produced four models. The most recent of these, exemplified by the essays edited by Biagini and Reid<sup>3</sup>, and Mark Bevir, sees the popular radicalism of the period not as something new and inventive, but as a continuation of pre-existing forms of radical protest dating back to, at least, the Chartists, and feeding into the twentieth century Labour Party. It is unclear from the Biagini and Reid collection whether or not socialism is included under this

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<sup>1</sup> See, Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*.

<sup>2</sup> Rodney Barker, *Education and Politics 1900-1951: A Study of the Labour Party*. Martin Lawn, *Servants of the State: the contested control of teaching 1900-1930*.

<sup>3</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism - Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850-1914*.

radical umbrella, and, as mentioned, the periodisation of this thesis does not allow for the tracing of any ideological antecedents. However, this apart, this thesis will argue that any connections between liberalism/radicalism and socialism in this period were often extremely fraught if not, indeed, characterised by outright hostility. It is clear, then, that any commonality of interest and ideology between the two was, by the mid 1880s already fast becoming a matter of history.

The second model used to understand the socialism of this period can make a convincing claim to longevity and describes this socialism as a sect. Henry Collins used this sect model when he described the S.D.F. as “blinkerred.”<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm has traced the lineage of this argument back to Marx, Engels and Lenin and has replicated this view, perhaps as part of a wider project of explaining the failure of socialism to take a firm hold of the British working class.<sup>2</sup> This was Ross McKibben’s explicit aim when he asked *Why was there no Marxism in Britain?* He recycled the sectarian model and analysed some of the sociology that, he maintained, underlay this sectarianism. He argued that there was a degree of mistrust between the working class and the predominantly middle-class leaders of socialist organisations.<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Foote maintained that the ethical socialism of this period marked a “withdrawal from the world as such.”<sup>4</sup> More recently Chris Waters has examined the cultural ramifications of this. He maintains, that even if they were from the skilled working class, socialists were “lonely and isolated, uncomfortable amidst the conviviality of pub-centred working-class culture”. Such individuals “remained aloof” huddled together for warmth and security in organisations which became inward-looking sects precisely because they provided these delicate flowers with cultural protection from the cold blasts of drunken uncouthness that surrounded them.<sup>5</sup>

The works of Martin Crick and Karen Hunt on the S.D.F. have done much to refute the charges of sectarianism laid at the federation's door. Crick has

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Collins, ‘The Marxism of the S.D.F.’, in, Asa Briggs & John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, ‘Hyndman and the S.D.F.’, in, E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men, Studies in the History of Labour*, 233. Hobsbawm has elaborated this in his study, ‘The Labour Sects’, in, E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*.

<sup>3</sup> Ross McKibben, ‘Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?’ *The English Historical Review*, April 1984, 326.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought A History*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, 157-158 & 190.

shown how the “federation’s political theory was far more mature and flexible than the narrow dogmatism portrayed by such as Henry Collins.”<sup>1</sup> Along with Mark Bevir, Crick’s work calls for a re-assessment of the Federation’s founder Henry Myers Hyndman. This is important since it is through an attack on Hyndman and his rather eccentric and bombastic style that his contemporaries and subsequent historians of both the right and the left have sought to attack the whole organisation. Crick’s work, particularly with regard to the relations between socialism and trade unionism, can be seen as a development of E.P. Thompson’s works which went to great lengths to detail the connections between socialists and unions.<sup>2</sup> Karen Hunt has built on this and has pointed out that the received wisdom of the S.D.F.’s hostility towards trades unionism is false.<sup>3</sup> However, the fact that Hunt needed to do this itself gives ample testimony to the strength of this myth. This study of socialists in relation to education will build on these works and call into question the use of the sect typology by showing how socialists tempered their criticism of working-class parents and middle-class teachers by attempts, which were occasionally successful, to find common ground.

The fact that the universal application of the sect typology is inappropriate does not mean that socialism in the 1880s and 1890s was similar to the current variants of the ideology. Indeed the difference was obvious to contemporaries other than Marx, Engels, and Lenin. In 1926 Joseph Clayton thought that socialism defined as “a cause, a new order of society to be set up”<sup>4</sup>, had changed so much since 1884 that it had in fact died off leaving behind only its name and a programme of social reform. W. Stephen Sanders identified what was missing from the twentieth century version of the ideology when he wrote that the characteristic “emotional intensity” which attracted him to the movement in 1888 was gone by 1927.<sup>5</sup> As early as 1911 Harry Lowerison noted this change and wrote that he missed the simple days when Thoreau was required reading for any socialist.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, E. P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’, in, A. Briggs, ed., *Essays in Labour History*, and, Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds, *Liberalism and the rise of Labour 1890-1918*, especially page 46.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists, the Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884-1911*, especially pages 7-16.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Clayton, *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Britain 1884-1924*, preface VII-VIII.

<sup>5</sup> W. Stephen Sanders, *Early Socialist Days*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> *The Clarion*, 23 March 1911.



It is not the purpose of this thesis to deny that there was an emotionally powerful moral dynamic in turn of the century socialism. Still less is it the aim to show that there was an ethical vacuum in socialist education, indeed all education in this country has arguably been as much about the imparting of a moral code as it has been about the diffusion of knowledge. However, what will be questioned are two of the other historiographical paradigms of the socialist movement of this period. The first of these argues that socialism was, in Patrick Joyce's words, "first about moral and spiritual transformation, and only secondly about social change."<sup>1</sup> Although this view has enjoyed a recent burst of popularity it can be seen, especially in Waters's work, as a continuation of the longer-standing perspective that describes the socialism of this period as a sect, that is to say as an organisation that was more concerned with the purity of its membership than what these members were supposed to be doing in the wider world. As representatives of this tendency one could also highlight Stanley Pierson whose work claims that all the socialists of the time were millenialists possessed of "an extravagant confidence in the transforming power of ideas and moral sentiments."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that socialism described itself as the new religion has led Patrick Joyce to question the interpretation of this as a class analysis and to conclude that what was on offer from British socialists of the late nineteenth century was populist, universalist and inclusive and, therefore, closely akin to radical liberalism.<sup>3</sup> David Howell has argued that socialists did not conduct analyses of social questions<sup>4</sup> and in a similar vein Hilda Kean, on the subject of the S.D.F., has concluded that the federation did not view children's hunger in terms of class oppression.<sup>5</sup> Some qualified support for this line has also come from Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds who have noted that socialism was not primarily a "scientific analysis of society."<sup>6</sup> This thesis will argue that, contrary to this view, socialists did undertake critical surveys of educational questions and that these were based on the understanding that "the struggle of the labourer against capital

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914*, 300.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Pierson, *British Socialism: the journey from fantasy to reality*, 349. The title of this work is instructive of his general view of the socialism of the 1880s and 1890s.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888-1906*, 352.

<sup>5</sup> Hilda Kathleen Kean, *State Education Policy 1900-1930: The Nature of the Socialist and Teacher Trade Unionist Response*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918*, 33.

... does exist, whatever the apologists of capital may say.”<sup>1</sup> The political ramifications of this led to hostility towards all parties on the hustings at school board elections, including Liberals and radicals.

The labour programme deals with a new social order based on brotherhood. Whether the capitalists who have fattened on labour in the past describe themselves as Conservatives or Liberals, does not, in the remotest degree affect the issue ... Labour, without regard to political shibboleths, must storm and destroy the strongholds of privilege within which they have entrenched themselves.<sup>2</sup>

In order to achieve this socialists were very clear that the organisational and political means employed must not be inimical to the end. The Fellowship, the vehicle of the religion of humanity, was thus both the end and the means of struggle. This overriding idea of unity also showed up in their analysis of society and in their prescriptions for education. Historians have tried to make this analysis fit into a conceptual framework that is based on a dualism. The juxtaposed poles of this analysis are variously labelled as, on the one side, idealist, ethical, moral, or utopian, and, on the other side, political, pragmatic, realist, or materialist. But this socialism does not fit into such easy compartments and what needs to be stressed is that the analysis of society and the prescriptions for action used by this socialism deployed simultaneously terms which many historians have seen as mutually exclusive. As one letter writer to the Sunderland I.L.P.’s newspaper wrote “what Blake calls ‘Jerusalem’ will never be built here or anywhere else unless we recognise that moral and material improvement ought to be indissolubly wedded.”<sup>3</sup> The study of socialism in relation to education allows one not only to perceive this unity but also, perhaps, to go some way towards explaining it. Here the local and democratic nature of the state, as represented in school boards is of paramount importance. The political power these afforded offered the chance of achieving material improvements as the direct and tangible outcome of a demonstration of moral integrity at the polls.

The third established approach to the study of socialism in this period ignores this unity and divides socialists into two groups: those who advanced an economic or political analysis and course of action and a

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Trades Unions’, *The Labour Standard*, 4 June 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Shaw Maxwell, ‘Labour and Politics’, *The Labour Union Journal (Bradford)*, 26 May 1892.

<sup>3</sup> A Parish Priest, letter to *The Socialist*, July 1894.

second group of moralists or ethical socialists. This is a very long-established perspective. In 1884, when the Fellowship of the New Life split, George Bernard Shaw noted that one group, those who became the Fabian Society, wanted to “organise the docks” and so chose to part company with those who were content “to sit among the dandelions.”<sup>1</sup> This may be a celebrated example of Shavian wit but an examination of socialist education policies will seriously question the wisdom of employing this simple division of late-nineteenth century socialists into ‘doers’ and ‘dreamers’.

Examples of historians who use the ‘doer’ - ‘dreamer’ dichotomy model include Mark Bevir, whose analysis divided the movement up into three groups, Marxists (the S.D.F., Morris and the Socialist League, and Bax), the Fabians, and lastly, the Ethicals. He described the Fabians, approvingly, as “realists”. This laudable category is defined “in opposition to idealism and purism. Reality accepts the reality of political power and the need to act in order to obtain it.”<sup>2</sup> David Howell differentiated what he views as the materialist S.D.F. from the moral I.L.P.<sup>3</sup> Bernard Barker similarly described the I.L.P. as representing “sentimental, ethical socialists” of “fine and vague” aspirations.<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Foote separated ethical socialists (into which category he placed Edward Carpenter, the Glasiers and Robert Blatchford), whose political thought “was utopian in the worst sense of the word”,<sup>5</sup> from Fabians and Marxists. Stephen Yeo, who recognised that the socialism of this period “did rather well”,<sup>6</sup> noted that the movement in general and the Labour Church, in particular, showed only “an *occasional* awareness of the way in which *material* conditions affected what was possible or not possible in any religion or any form of association, including the religion of socialism.”<sup>7</sup> In a recent contribution to the field Duncan Tanner<sup>8</sup> has sought to remove much of the scorn, implicitly or explicitly, heaped on ‘ethical’ socialism and has argued, against the grain, for its

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in, W.H.G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, 332.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Bevir, *British Socialist Thought 1880-1900*, 299. See also his, ‘H.M. Hyndman: a Re-reading and a Re-assessment’, *History of Political Thought*, vol. XII, no. 1, 125, where he differentiates Hyndman from the ‘ethical’ socialist James Bruce Glasier.

<sup>3</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888-1906*, 352-362.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Barker, ‘Introduction’, in, *Ramsey MacDonald’s Political Writings*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought A History*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Yeo, ‘The Religion of Socialism’, *History Workshop Journal*, VII, 1979, 219.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Yeo, ‘The New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896’, *History Workshop Journal*, IV, 1977, 19. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan Tanner, ‘Ideological debate in Edwardian Labour politics: Radicalism, Revisionism and Socialism’, in, Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism - Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850-1914*, 272.

ideological sophistication. This is welcome and useful as far as it goes, but it still accepts the existence of a group of socialists defined solely by their apparent ethicalism.

Within histories that use the dualist approach there is, therefore, a marked tendency to assign the various socialist groupings to one or other pole of the pairing. A materialist S.D.F. and a utopian I.L.P. is the favoured view of Howell's work and this has re-surfaced in Karen Hunt's assertion that the S.D.F., in common with all adherents of the Second International had an "economistic definition of Marxism."<sup>1</sup> This provides the first of two reasons for rejecting such an approach, because if it is difficult or distorting to label an individual socialist as 'ethical' or 'materialist' it sheds even less light upon the subject when such labels are used to typecast groups of such individuals. This is especially true of the socialism of the 1880s and 1890s when organisational affiliation could be very arbitrary indeed. It is worth noting that on joining the movement, which he characterised as emotionally intense, Sanders actually signed up with the S.D.F.. Similarly, though Harry Lowerison's writing is intensely personal and emotional, when he joined an organisation he chose the Fabians who are usually portrayed as being coldly bureaucratic and more interested in efficiency than equity. Given this it is hardly surprising that others, such as J.F. Oakeshott, found that belonging to both the Fabians and the New Fellowship presented them with no real ideological contradiction.<sup>2</sup> This is not to enter a debate on the question of whether the S.D.F. or the Fabians were emotional or materialistic, but rather to point out that such a debate is undertaken on a basis that is fundamentally flawed since the members of these organisations held to both things at the same time and that the character of the movement cut across the boundaries apparently placed around groups of socialists by their organisational affiliation.

In part the conclusion that different groups had widely different agendas is a product of studies that have focused on groups, parties and organisations, or of the biographical approach, as applied to the leading lights of these organisations. This method of research tends to highlight the unique about the group or person under study and so accentuates differences. The extrapolation of leaders and their written remarks from the movement as a

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists, the Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884-1911*, 253.

<sup>2</sup> J.F. Oakeshott, 'Practical Versus Idealist Socialism', *Seed-time*, Oct. 1890.

whole that characterises these types of work has further exacerbated the apparent division of the moral and the material. In reality these statements were made in the context of a movement wherein the writer of, for example, works on socialist morality, would be aware that others were making more materialist pronouncements. Viewing socialism not merely as a series of apparently isolated remarks made by discreet individuals but as a movement allows one to contextualise these works far more appropriately. This thesis is a study of the education policies of the socialist movement as a whole, rather than of a group or individual and so will draw out similarities and moral-material connections that cut across these apparently solid party lines. To an extent all historians get the answers to the questions they decide to ask, and though differences within the movement will be presented here, there is, nonetheless, an inherent danger that this type of study may go too far in redressing the balance against an institutional or biographical approach and find similarities simply by looking for them. However, this is a risk worth running since these connections and the real nature of socialist education in Britain in these years have been buried for too long.

There can be no real doubt that the socialism of this period forwarded a remarkable ethical critique of the prevailing order of society. The construction of this socialist ethic began with an attack on the religious moralising which had a key role in the apologia used by the ruling class to justify the social and political status quo. Socialists did not simply reject the tenor of what was proffered to them from these sources; they refused to accept that any idea brought forward in the defence of capitalist individualism could ever even be considered ethical or moral at all since the system was morally and ethically indefensible. Its individualism was fundamentally anti-social. It “began and ended with the relation of individuals to things”<sup>1</sup> and was thus diametrically opposed to the social collectivity which was, as James Leatham amongst others put it, the true source of all morality.<sup>2</sup> On this all socialists could agree. This is true even of those whom a dualist approach consigns to opposing poles. Thus Carpenter (usually seen as an ‘ethical’ socialist par excellence<sup>3</sup>) wrote: “political economy has been exhausted of all conceptions of justice between man and man, of charity, affection, and the instinct of solidarity; and has

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<sup>1</sup> Bellamy, *Equality*, 87.

<sup>2</sup> James Leatham, ‘Morals in the Social Democratic State, Chapter 6’, *Justice*, 11 Jan. 1896.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Commanding the heart: Edward Carpenter and friends’, *History Today*, Sept. 1998.

been founded on its lowest discoverable factor, namely self-interest.”<sup>1</sup> Bax, (usually taken to be the prime example of Victorian materialism) in his turn, saw that, “there can be no greater absurdity than to attempt to found morality on a calculation of profit and loss to the individual, or in other words, on the self-interest of the utilitarian empiricists. Out of pure individualism it is obviously impossible to get an Ethic at all.”<sup>2</sup>

From this unanimous philosophical starting point the socialist movement developed two inflections of its discourse which emphasised variously, to use the most common language of the time, the ‘moral’ and the ‘material’, with various socialists emphasising one or the other on occasions. From this has developed the model used by many, if not most historians, which states that sections of the movement were exclusively ‘moral’ and others exclusively ‘material’. The former group held the view that the building of the socialist ethic was a fundamental prerequisite for the toppling of capitalism. The second, which reversed the order of cause and effect, saw that a socialist ethic could only be produced by a socialist society and that this could only be built after some form of economic re-ordering of society.

Therefore, the second reason why this dualist model is inappropriate is that socialists whom these views assign to either the ‘moral’ or the ‘material’ camp, were, in reality, a great deal less easy to pigeon hole. Members of the moral group made highly materialistic statements and the materialists were at times very moralistic. The juxtaposition of moral and material thus ignores their fundamental unity within socialist thought of the period and is thus anachronistic. “Socialism is”, as one author in *Justice* phrased it,

a dual system. It is material in its dealing with economic problems. It is as spiritual, as ethical, as altruistic - or whatever word may be preferred - in its dealings with the intellectual and moral attributes of mankind, as any religion ever propagated. ... A system which fails to act in accordance with this duality of attributes would be predestined to failure.<sup>3</sup>

It is of course true that some socialists preferred to use moralistic forms of expression. But even a brief examination of the evidence is very instructive. John Trevor was the founder of the Labour Church movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter, ‘Modern Science - a criticism’, in, *Civilisation-its cause and Cure*, 79.

<sup>2</sup> E.B. Bax, ‘The New Ethic’, in, *Ethics and Socialism*, 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> A.S. Headingley, ‘The Moral and Material Aspects of Socialism’, *Justice*, 1 June 1901.

On one of the church's handbills recruiting Labour Church Pioneers he quoted Walt Whitman thus: "Is reform needed? Is it through **YOU**. The greater the reform needed the greater the **PERSONALITY** you need to accomplish it."<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter asked his readers not to be misled into believing that science or the pursuit of material reform could effect any substantive reform of society. The best they could achieve would be a change "quite upon the surface" since "it is the moral births and outgrowths that originate, science and the intellect only give form to these."<sup>2</sup> If Trevor and Carpenter's ethicalism may thus seem to be obvious so too can Bax's materialism. "Socialism", he wrote, 'breaks through these shams in protesting that no amount of determinism on the part of the individual to regenerate himself, however successful he may be in cultivating the correct ethical trim, will of itself effect in aught the welfare of society.'<sup>3</sup> His socialism sought the "ideal individual through the ideal society"<sup>4</sup> and he insisted that in his quest to change society the revolutionary would be wasting his time if he looked within himself. He should instead keep "the social cause ... in view" which was realisable through an "economic new birth".<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately for historians who seek to apply generalising labels to the movement of the 1880s and 1890s, this is only part of the whole picture. For example, Bax did not always see material change as a precursor of moral change. In *Commonweal* he wrote of the new ethic being present at the birth of the new society<sup>6</sup> and in his *The New Ethic* he also wrote that the germs of the new social morality could be seen in the best of the working class of his day.<sup>7</sup> The apparent clarity of a cause-effect relationship between economic change and moral improvement (with the former being instigator of the latter) is thus much more blurred than it may first appear. Any clarity when the cause-effect relationship is reversed (the 'ethical' position) proves similarly illusory.

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<sup>1</sup> Handbill recruiting Labour Church Pioneers, in Senate House Library. Emphasis and Capitals in original. The Pioneers were Labour Church sympathisers who lived too far away from a church to be able to attend regularly.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Social Progress and Individual Effort*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> E.B. Bax, 'Introduction', *The Religion of Socialism*, X1.

<sup>4</sup> E.B. Bax, 'The New Ethic', in, Bax, *The Ethics of Socialism*, 19. See also, Bax & Morris, *The Manifesto of The Socialist League*, 6, thus: "but moreover, men's social and moral relationships would be seriously modified by this gain of economical freedom, and by the collapse of the superstitions, moral and other, which necessarily accompany a state of economical slavery."

<sup>5</sup> E.B. Bax, 'The New Ethic', in, Bax, *The Ethics of Socialism*, 18-19.

<sup>6</sup> Bax, 'The New Ethic', *The Commonweal*, 25 Feb. 1888.

<sup>7</sup> E.B. Bax, 'The New Ethic', in, *The Ethics of Socialism*, 18-19.

In a recent article on Edward Carpenter, Marie-Francoise Cachin has pronounced that only one of his many works is political.<sup>1</sup> This is his *Non-Governmental Society*. There is no doubt that this is a political work. But this begs the question ‘what is the rest of his work about?’ Cachin has built her classification on terms that were most definitely not those of the socialists of this period. For them the moral, the personal, or, the ethical were intensely and intimately political. Bax phrased this unity thus: “in socialism ethics becomes political and politics becomes ethical.”<sup>2</sup> In this scheme issues which may have since come to be considered as only ethical (and it is worth noting that these issues are relegated to a position of less importance than ‘real’ ‘political’ issues by this model) were thus political and so were seen to impact upon all other aspects of life. This belief had obvious repercussions when it came to criticising the existing school curriculum and in the design of a new one. Since to socialists it was a matter of obvious common-sense “that Politics, Economics, and Ethics are but parts of one science of life”<sup>3</sup> it was clear that they should be taught as one subject because their divorce from each other both reflected and reinforced the atomisation of knowledge and power that characterised the anti-social system of late Victorian Britain.

The study of socialist education policy shows that even socialists who may have stressed the moral over the material, or those who emphasised the material, rarely, if ever, did so in total abstraction from the other. It is as impossible to find an example of a socialist in this period who was ‘material’ as it is to find his ‘ethical’ comrade. The fifth principle of the Labour Church is a case in point. This made clear that the “development of Personal Character and the improvement of social conditions are both essential to man’s emancipation from moral and social bondage.”<sup>4</sup> This unity of moral and material was made manifest in the demand that children receive all they needed to develop healthy minds in healthy bodies.

William Morris was typical of this unity of ‘moral’ and ‘material’. He wrote that “the foundation of socialism therefore is economical ... But this economical aim ... must be accompanied by an ethical or religious sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Marie-Francoise Cachin, ‘Non-Governmental Society: Edward Carpenter’s Position in the British Socialist Movement’, *Prose Studies*, 13 (1), 1990.

<sup>2</sup> E. B. Bax, ‘The New Ethic’, *Commonweal*, 25 Feb. 1888, 59.

<sup>3</sup> J.F. Oakeshott, ‘Practical Versus Idealist Socialism’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Sidney E. Dark, ‘Socialists and Education’, *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1893. Capitals in original.



the responsibility of each man to each and all of his fellows.”<sup>1</sup> However, Morris’s typicality has not been appreciated. Rather he has been portrayed by David Howell as a Marxist crying in the wilderness whose “accessible idiom ... was not taken up.”<sup>2</sup> Following directly from Howell’s work, to which he makes frequent references, Patrick Joyce has added that socialists selected their inspiration from the “pantheon of Liberalism ... Marx and Morris were not much bothered with.”<sup>3</sup> This conclusion is a product of viewing Morris as a Marxist materialist (as do Mark Bevir and E.P. Thompson) rather than as a late nineteenth century English socialist who sought to weld together the moral and the material. The study of socialist educational ideas will show that Morris’s ideas were in fact as representative of the mainstream of his day throughout the country as they were in Sheffield, where Carpenter recalled that his fellows “hailed William Morris and his work with the most sincere appreciation.”<sup>4</sup>

This study will utilise the published and unpublished works of the eminent socialists of the period. Some of these have never been scrutinised before. However, in order to be able to comment upon the conclusions of other historians, this study will also re-visit the well-known sources (*The Clarion*, *Justice*, and *The Labour Leader*, for example). Often where the sources are familiar new sections will be used. For example the writings of *The Clarion* journalist Simeon Twigg, who had a very strong interest in education, along with the children’s columns of socialist newspapers have rarely, if ever, received any attention from historians. Given the distance between this study and the period in question it is inevitable that this thesis will rely heavily upon written source material. This imposes limitations upon the study, but these are restrictions shared by all researchers into late Victorian Britain and the awareness of these limits has led to this study being based upon as wide a range of sources as is possible.

This study will also highlight the works of two socialists whose achievements have been largely ignored. These are Frederick James Gould (F.J. Gould) and Harry Lowerison.<sup>5</sup> Both these men were of the middle

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, ‘A Theory of Life’, in, *News From Nowhere and Other Writings*, 151.

<sup>2</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888- 1906*, 352.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People*, 77.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Sheffield and Socialism*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> The only published work on Harry Lowerison is my, ‘Establishing the Fellowship: Harry Lowerison and Ruskin School Home, a turn of the century socialist and his educational experiment’, *History of Education*, vol. 26. no. 1, 1997. The only aspect of Gould’s life and work to have received attention is his time in Leicester. This is covered in three sources: Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and*

rank of socialists in their day. This means that they are more indicative of the general opinions and activities of ordinary socialists than are the more colourful and idiosyncratic better-known names. Both were journalists and prolific writers of books. Lowerison was well-known on the socialist lecture circuit. He served a year on the Fabian Society's National Executive Committee. He founded the Clarion Field Clubs, was an early member of the London Schools' Swimming Association and set up the London Schools Rambling Association. F.J. Gould was a member of the Leicester School Board and the Leicester Secular Society. Both men are especially useful to a study of socialist education as they were both also employed as teachers by the London School Board.

Though these two men loom fairly large in these pages this is a study of the socialist movement, not a biographical work nor one based on a particular party or group. This has to a certain extent dictated the thematic organisation of this work. The themes themselves have not, it is hoped, been selected and imposed onto the material but rather have been discerned from socialist concerns as manifested in the source material reviewed. The six chapters, each representing one of these themes, can be viewed as pairs. The first pair examines the late-nineteenth century socialist understanding of the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. Each chapter will try to assess the degree to which socialists saw people as victims of a system and the extent to which they were seen as having freedom within the system to make key decisions. This will enable conclusions to be drawn about the applicability of historiographical models that describe this socialism as 'ethical'. Chapter one looks at this theme through the example of parents and their relationship with children and education and goes on to look at the educational role of the family in the socialist society of the future as portrayed in utopian writings. In Chapter two the focus is on teachers and their behaviour within the education system. Because teachers were regarded by socialists through the actions of their unions this chapter contains an examination of the general socialist attitude towards trade unions which is used to cast light on the particular attitude in question, that of socialists to teacher trade unionism. It also begins this thesis's examination of the socialist position vis-a-vis the middle class.

The second pair of chapters examines in detail the socialist proposals for education. Chapter three, where the work of Gould and Lowerison is presented, examines the general debates within the movement that are highlighted through the study of education such as the socialist position in relation to philanthropy. This chapter will consider the detail of programmes of socialist education focusing on such issues as physical and sex education. These will be used to draw conclusions about the nature of the socialist conception of the place of the individual in the social system. Chapter four examines in detail the socialist plan for technical education. This aspect of education has been given a chapter of its own in order to reflect the importance it was given in debates in the late nineteenth century. This chapter opens with an assessment of the place of work in socialist discourse. It proceeds to survey the socialist position in the politics of technical education and to outline the socialist plan for technical education which is used to draw conclusions about the relationship between socialism, the middle class, and liberalism.

The last pair of chapters, five and six, pick up the political theme begun in chapter four. Chapter five presents the socialist conception of the nature of a full democratic education. It then moves on to examine the movement's political position on the hustings at school board elections and, in more general terms, the socialist attitude to the state. The importance of school boards is located within this framework. School boards are the central feature of the final chapter which focuses on the politics of the abolition of the boards in 1902 and the effects this had on the movement as a whole. The issues examined within the last two chapters are what most people would define as 'politics'. However, it is central to this thesis that socialists employed a far wider definition of politics than this and saw the political as being present within the closed world of 'private' moral relationships. Therefore, it would be anachronistic to understate the centrality of the family, the key moral institution of the period, to the socialist movement and it is thus with a study of this institution that this thesis will begin.

# CHAPTER 1

## Socialism and the ‘religion, education, family question’

We defy any human being to point to a single reality, good or bad, in the composition of the *bourgeois* family. It has the merit of being the most perfect specimen of the complete sham that history has presented to the world. There are no holes in the texture through which reality might chance to peer. The *bourgeois* hearth dreads honesty as its cat dreads cold water.

Ernest Belfort Bax, *The Religion of Socialism*, 141.

There can be little doubt that the co-operative commonwealth towards which all late-nineteenth century socialists worked would provide a good life for children. In this future age the object of all child care would be the drawing out of each child's own unique attributes to produce fully-rounded individuals freed from the alienation of urban industrial capitalism. This socialism also argued that such a goal could never be reached by means that were inimical to it, for “brotherhood must not only be talked of but practised.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the ideology placed the welfare of children high on its agenda and commensurate with this, it raised serious questions about both the material quality of life of ordinary working people and about the nature of the family as it was constituted in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. These more general points led to a particular doubt being cast over the suitability of parents to act as the educators of their children. This prioritising of children was given a fillip by other aspects of socialism.

The most notable of these was the rationalism of much socialist thought in this period. Many leading socialists seemed to operate under the belief that because they accepted the new doctrines, because the truths about the social and political system that socialism laid bare were self-evident to them, that they should also be self-evident, preferably upon first hearing, to anyone

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Mann & Ben Tillet, *The New Trades Unionism*, 15-16.

and everyone. This feeling may have been heightened in some socialists by the fact that they had turned their backs on their own middle-class origins to join the new religion only to find that the workers whom they intended to help resisted all offers of such help. In his novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Robert Tressell wrote of the hell on earth which his characters inhabited and commented that

the remedy was so simple, the evil so great and so glaringly evident that the only possible explanation of its continued existence was that the majority of ... workers were devoid of the power of reasoning. If these people were not mentally deficient they would of their own accord have swept this silly system away long ago. It would not have been necessary for anyone to teach them that it was wrong.<sup>1</sup>

This theme was picked up by Thomas Ince in his poem *The People* thus:

When will the toilers use reason?  
When will they show common-sense? ...  
Now is the chance and the season  
To thwart the usurper's pretence.<sup>2</sup>

This attitude was not the sole prerogative of the poet or fiction writer. James Bruce Glasier described the workers as “dunderheads and donkeys ... sneaks, flunkeys, cowards, traitors and nincompoops.”<sup>3</sup> Hyndman thought that they were “too ignorant and apathetic”. There was, he wrote, “nothing more discouraging ... than their lack of initiative and go.”<sup>4</sup> Robert Blatchford wrote of their “apathy, ignorance, stupidity, and meanness.”<sup>5</sup> Fallows, secretary of the Birmingham Socialist Centre, saw their “moral stupidity and weakness” as being “the chief hindrance to the realisation of reform.”<sup>6</sup> John Trevor regarded them as “docile, idle and stupid.”<sup>7</sup> Edward Carpenter was either being slightly more tolerant or more paternalistic when he, in turn, described them as “patient, broad-backed, good-humoured [and] simple.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 66-67.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Ince, ‘The People’, in, Brian Maidment, ed., *The Poorhouse Fugitives - self taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, 270-271.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Glasier, ‘Straight Talk’, *The People's Press*, 3 Jan. 1891.

<sup>4</sup> H.M. Hyndman, *The English Workers as they are*, 128-9. See also Hyndman, ‘The Coming Struggle at the School Board Election’, *Justice*, 23 Oct. 1897.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Robert Blatchford to James Bruce Glasier, 1 July 1892. The Pickles Collection, Pic/3.

<sup>6</sup> J.A. Fallows M.A., *Moral Teaching in the Board Schools*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> John Trevor, *An Independent Labour Party*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal*, 46.

This could be the creed of despair. James Leatham in Aberdeen told those who listened to his lecture *The Class War* that

you prefer the man with money to the man with brains and good intentions. You snub your political friends, and send them away sick at heart and despairing of you and your cause. It is little wonder if at times we get sick of you, get sick of talking to you.<sup>1</sup>

But equally it could be an inspiration to keep on struggling to save future generations from the crushing weight of such ignorance, as Robert Blatchford noted in 1893, “to be candid I don’t so much care about the stupid, selfish, ignorant British workman. But for the sake of the little children ... I keep the field.”<sup>2</sup> Four years later *Justice*, reporting on ‘The Coming Struggle at the School Board Elections’, made the same point: “Comrades, the more complete the apathy, the denser the ignorance of the mass of Englishmen around us, the greater the responsibility which falls to us.”<sup>3</sup>

Socialists did not assume the workers were naturally and inalienably ignorant, rather that this ignorance was a product and a tool of the system that enslaved them. This, however, put them into a quandary. How could the class be emancipated when it was too ignorant to realise that it was enslaved and, on the basis of this ignorance, made immoral decisions which perpetuated its captivity? A dual track of short and longer-term strategies was followed as the way clear of this morass. Propaganda was used to try to recruit as many adults as possible and this was coupled with a heavy emphasis on the education of children. Since the overriding view was that people were ignorant, this emphasis on education carried with it clear implications for the role of workers as parents all of which pointed clearly in the strategic direction of changing this role. This goal was to be reached by way of the tactics of limiting parents’ roles or making them realise their duties as citizens. It is the aim of this chapter to examine firstly, the socialist analysis of the position in which working-class parents found themselves in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and then to go on to examine how this position effected their children. This will draw out the interconnected material and moral analysis of society and the family that was deployed by socialists in this period. The final section will present

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<sup>1</sup> James Leatham, *The Class War*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Robert Blatchford to James Bruce Glasier, 1 July 1892. The Pickles Collection, Pic/3.

<sup>3</sup> Hyndman, ‘The Coming Struggle at the School Board Election’, *Justice*, 23 Oct. 1897.

the role envisaged for the family in the future socialist state by examining its portrayal in socialist utopian writings.

### **The system as it affected parents**

The socialist analysis of, and prescriptions for changing society fused the moral and the material elements of life which have since been viewed as separate spheres. However, given the current historiographical trend which denies that socialism was anything other than a moral revolt it is worth taking some time to consider the material side of this analysis. This can be seen, for example, in the works of John Trevor. In a letter to a Labour Church congregation Trevor wrote that what the worker needed was not personal moral guidance but the “emancipation of labour.”<sup>1</sup> This, as he wrote elsewhere, could only be based on the equal possession of the means of economic production.<sup>2</sup> In Trevor’s Labour Church movement there were, according to the memory of one of its members, “loud and persistent” cries for “the needed economic change.”<sup>3</sup> Pete Curran was applauded for endorsing this view in Barrow Labour Church. This institution, he told his audience, was based on the “broad human principle”, which he supported, “of the welfare of people while they live in this world.” He urged them “go down to the social basis and abolish the depredation of ignorance in the people, and develop them mentally and physically.”<sup>4</sup> Bradford’s Labour Church headed note paper bore the caption “Object: The realisation of heaven IN THIS LIFE”.<sup>5</sup> In the Fellowship of the New Life it was accepted that moral regeneration was vital but that it would be pointless unless it “immediately translated itself into a movement for a further political and economic evolution.”<sup>6</sup>

In the socialist view people compelled, by the monopolistic ownership of land, to work for others in order to survive had to take the wages they were offered.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in D.F. Summers, *The Labour Church and Allied Movements in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (University of Essex PhD 1958) 499.

<sup>2</sup> John Trevor, *Our First Principle*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> D.B. Foster, *Socialism and the Christ*, 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Un-sourced press cutting entitled, ‘Barrow Labour Church’. Coll. Misc. 375.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from G.W. Smith to J. Lister (Bradford) 1893. Capitals in original. I.L.P.4, Johnson Papers, 93/5 18-2.

<sup>6</sup> J.F. Oakeshott, ‘Practical Versus Idealist Socialism’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1890.

What is the price the worker sells his labour at? A bare living! ... What the capitalist squeezes out of the man over and above the latter's bare living, he applies to his own wants, or turns into fresh capital, putting it either into his own business or some other profitable investment.<sup>1</sup>

The much-trumpeted freedom of contract between employer and employee was, in reality, not a free exchange between equal participants. The worker, with no resources, being offered, by the capitalist, possessed of "the whole means of producing wealth and employing labour at his command", a choice between just enough or starvation was, in reality, being given no real choice at all.<sup>2</sup> When he gave a lecture on 'The Deficiencies of Radicalism' to members of the Fellowship of the New Life, Maurice Adams, editor of *Seed-time*, told his audience that "a contract between a disinherited man and a monopolist can never be *fair*, and can only be *free* in the sense that a drowning man is free in giving all that he has for his life."<sup>3</sup>

So systematically and inextricably were the two classes combined that it was impossible to explain the position of the one without reference to the other. Education was part and parcel of this system.

The theory of socialism is that the division of society into classes renders social warfare inevitable while the class divisions continue to exist. Socialism contends that the poverty of the poor is caused by the robbery on the part of the rich. The mansion explains the hovel ... The factory, the foundry, the ship-building yard account for the shooting lodge, the yacht and the tours in foreign lands ... The withdrawal from school at an early age of the worker's son enables the guilded youth to put in years at college.<sup>4</sup>

Late-nineteenth century Britain was characterised by a social system that all socialists despised and that some saw as being too corrupted to deserve the name society at all. Edward Carpenter was only the most notable to call modern society a disease, so riddled was it with the anti-social drives of competition that, as part of an interconnected and systematic process, alienated people both from each other and also from their true, better and social selves.<sup>5</sup> The object towards which socialists worked was a society

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<sup>1</sup> 'Manifesto of the Socialist Union', *The Socialist*, July 1886.

<sup>2</sup> John Ward, 'Socialism; the Religion of Humanity', 10.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Adams, 'The Deficiencies of Radicalism', *Seed-time*, Jan. 1895. Italics in Original.

<sup>4</sup> James Leatham, *The Class War*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation its Cause and Cure*, 2-3.



which would allow each person to develop fully as an individual. This was the strategic aim of all socialist education policy and was reflected in the educational experiments and the classroom materials designed by some socialists. This type of education, along with other social, political and economic changes would lead, it was argued, to the re-socialisation of the individual to the extent that the terms 'individual' and 'society', if they did not become exactly synonymous, would no longer be the polar opposites that they were seen to be in British society at the close of the century. What was sought therefore, was the end of the dualism of individual and society.<sup>1</sup> This idea was often summed up in the powerful shorthand of the notion of Fellowship. This embraced the collapse of several other alienating dualisms. One of these was the split between education and leisure. On this point Bax and Morris, in a jointly-authored publication, wrote that under socialism, "no man will ever 'finish' his education while he is alive, and his early training will never lie behind him a piece of mere waste as it most often does now."<sup>2</sup>

Socialists argued that there was an intimate interrelationship between the environment and men's character. The environment was not, however, a natural given, it was in turn, the product of a social, political and economic system namely capitalism. As James Leatham put it, "we don't preach hatred of men's character, but hatred of systems and those features of men's characters which are the outcome of the false and bad in those systems."<sup>3</sup> That these false and bad characteristics, such as ignorance of course, were systematically produced was axiomatic. However, none of this was so totally subsuming as to leave people totally devoid of choice. Even though the broad social, economic and political framework was given, socialists argued that people could still make choices, such as whether to exploit or beat children, within this system. Indeed it was through the results of these choices as well as through the workings of the unseen hand that the system reproduced itself. Before going into the details of how parents abused children it is necessary to look in more detail at precisely how the system made parents unfit to be the educators of their children.

The deleterious results of their way of life for the majority of the population can be divided into three main groups. Each had serious implications for

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, 'The Significance of the Individual', *Seed-time*, Oct. 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Bax and Morris, *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, 317.

<sup>3</sup> James Leatham, *The Class War*, 13-14.

the education of the working class and each seemed to necessitate an emphasis upon the next generation. These included amongst other things the physical and mental effects of chronic overwork, the effects of low wages and appalling living conditions, and finally, the absence of leisure time. Though it is convenient to study them singly it is essential to realise that socialists did not view them as isolated incidents of poverty but as elements of a package which amounted to capitalist exploitation. Dueckershuff, 'A German Miner', in his survey *How The English Workman Lives*, thought that "it may be affirmed that the greatest attention is here paid to the welfare of the children; and where this happens, the welfare of the grown ups will certainly not be neglected."<sup>1</sup> This is a view that has recently been echoed by Eric Hopkins in his *Childhood Transformed* where he has argued that by the end of the nineteenth century English working-class children were better off in terms of their domestic environment, health, nutrition, and leisure opportunities, than their grandparents had been.<sup>2</sup> Even if (and this, of course, is a very contentious point) these conditions were better than either those abroad, or those that had existed in England in the past, they certainly were not seen as being sufficient by socialists who stood this rose-tinted view on its head and saw ill-treated workers visiting ill-treatment upon their own children.

Allen Clarke, writing of the effects of the factory system, noted the numbing effects of intense labour,

it would seem that machinery tends to make machines of those who work it; reducing the brain to a sort of stupidity, to a level with the mechanism it manipulates; making men very much lower than the angels and a little higher than machines, with sufficient power of thought for automatic factory work, but a paralysation of all other mental faculties, and incapability of close and original thinking.<sup>3</sup>

This level of work prevented parents from even remembering whatever it was they had been taught at school, let alone bettering themselves. As Tressell wrote of those whose dulled ignorance he lambasted, "they were usually so tired when they got home at night that they never had any inclination for study or any kind of self-improvement, even if they had the time."<sup>4</sup> Moreover the daily grind of work so exhausted most working people that they were simply unable to care for their children as thoroughly

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<sup>1</sup> Dueckershuff [A German Miner], *How The English Workman Lives*, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed*.

<sup>3</sup> Allen Clarke, *Effects of the Factory System*, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 388.

as they would wish.<sup>1</sup> This was in addition to the effects of bad housing. As late as 1929 Margaret MacMillan was writing of families in Deptford who lived in two rooms. This meant, if it meant nothing else, that the accommodation was always noisy and this prevented young children from sleeping as soundly as they needed to if they were to develop properly at school or nursery.<sup>2</sup>

The ability of working-class parents to provide decent care for their children was made even harder by low wages. The London School Board General Purposes Committee was reported by *The Clarion* as having set up an enquiry into the legality of providing free school meals. The paper reported that one member of the Board argued that the right place to start to address this question was not with the children but the parents, and that if the economic conditions meant that they could not provide sufficient decent food for their children then the conditions should be changed. "Exactly. All parents ought to earn sufficient to feed their children. But they don't."<sup>3</sup> Not only were workers paid low wages but they were often in very insecure employment which meant that even the little they had could not be guaranteed. All that such a system guaranteed was a level of heightened competition between workers that would maintain low wages. Apart from this simple inability to provide the basics of life, low wages could have an immediate impact upon the education of working class children in that the parents might be unable to pay the 'school pence' and so keep their children at home. Insecurity and poverty produced physically and mentally stunted children "none to strong when born ... brought up under every possible disadvantage"<sup>4</sup> in slums deprived of fresh air and even light where disease and ill health were the norm.<sup>5</sup> How could one expect "love between children and parents" in the homes of the poor? asked Enid Stacey, "whilst the nagging anxiety of the struggle for bread injures the nervous system, saps self-control, and breeds discord in the over-crowded home."<sup>6</sup>

Given the squalor of the late Victorian urban environment it must come as no surprise to learn that there were mainstream demands for working-class

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, 'Mundella', *The Workman's Times*, 24 April 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Margaret MacMillan to Robert Blatchford 20 Feb. 1929. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A94/6.

<sup>3</sup> The Whatnot, 'Suffer Little Children', *The Clarion*, 9 Dec. 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Hyndman, *The English Workers as they are*, 134.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, 'The Municipal Land Reform Conference', *Land and Labour*, May 1900.

<sup>6</sup> Enid Stacey, *Education: its meaning, a socialist point of view*, 13.

children to be removed from the cities. This was the root of the frequent demands that children be sent to boarding schools. At the Elected Persons Conference held in Glasgow in 1900, Dan Irving of the S.D.F. argued that, “all schools should be removed from the evil surroundings of town life.”<sup>1</sup> H. Russell Smart read a paper to the Bradford Conference of the I.L.P., which went through at least three editions, in which he demanded the abolition of child labour, the raising of the school leaving age to 15 and the extension of the education acts to provide “FREE BOARDING SCHOOLS in the country, where the children of the poor may be sent by their parents ... brought up under such conditions they may be expected to develop into healthy and intelligent citizens.”<sup>2</sup>

True education took time and therefore required leisure time on the part of the parents both to educate themselves, and to take an active and informed interest in the education of their children. This lack of time led to a situation whereby “middle class people (who have sent their own children to other schools) ... manage the elementary schools provided for the children of the proletariat.”<sup>3</sup> In a lecture, provocatively entitled ‘The Morality of Laziness’, Sparling told his audience that, “one of the most essential things in our battle of today and one of the most essential things to be taken care of when we have won our battle, is the desire for and preservation of intelligent leisure.”<sup>4</sup> This would represent the end of the alienating separation of education from leisure. Morris called this intelligent leisure “elbow room”. The “expensive class” was, he wrote, born and bred to expect this breathing space from the struggle for life within which the “taste for reading and the habit of it, and the capacity for the enjoyment of refined thought and the expression of it” could be cultivated.<sup>5</sup>

Increases in the amount of available ‘elbow room’ could be achieved by the workers within the prevailing system. As a young member of the A.S.E. in Birmingham, Tom Mann benefited from the union's victorious struggle to reduce the working day.<sup>6</sup> In 1911 he recalled the effect of this. “Forty

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Irving, ‘The Physical Basis of Education’, *The Social Democrat*, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> H. Russell Smart, *The I.L.P. its programme and policy*, 11. Capitals in Original. I.L.P. 5.

<sup>3</sup> F.J. Gould, *A Socialist Plan of Education*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> H.H. Sparling, *The Morality of Laziness*, a lecture delivered at Gracechurch Street Labour Club, n.-d. Pickles Collection, PIC/112-31.

<sup>5</sup> William Morris, *Monopoly -or- how labour is robbed*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 4.

years ago. ... we started at six and knocked off at six. Then the change came; and instead of averaging sixty hours, it was ... fifty hours. ... Classes were started, and we youngsters had a chance to attend evening classes. ... and the important day came for being able to think.”<sup>1</sup> In chapter 5 it will be shown how William Morris was a staunch advocate of the working class acting independently to achieve such gains. Notwithstanding this desire for independent working-class political action to improve conditions he argued that the real issue was not any reduction in the working day that workers were able to force through, but rather the huge glaring disparity between the ‘elbow room’ available to the working, as opposed to the idle class which still remained even after such victories were won. This marked out one of the real “tests of the contrast” between the classes.<sup>2</sup> The only time available to the decorators that Tressell described which they could have used to study to improve themselves was in the winter, but since even these skilled workers were not paid if they were not working, “their favourite subject then was, how to preserve themselves from starving to death.”<sup>3</sup>

The best that most such workingmen could do, given the simple fact that the struggle for existence dominated their lives so completely, was to digest the pulp fiction that was disgorged by the burgeoning capitalist leisure industry. All such reading could hope to achieve was to occupy the mind in the same way that fiddling with a piece of string occupied the fingers of a fidgety person.<sup>4</sup> Bax thought that it was the absence of real culture along with its corollary, the “beer and bible” Sunday, that had kept the English working class politically compliant.<sup>5</sup> Looking backwards from the end of the twentieth century, the hero of one of Bellamy’s rip-van-winklesque novels commented on the “moral atmosphere of serenity resulting from an absolute freedom of mind from disturbing anxieties and carking cares concerning our material welfare or that of those dear to us”<sup>6</sup> which would be chiefly responsible for the universal spread of culture in this, the model society of the future. Although he regarded Bellamy’s societal vision as dystopian in the extreme, Morris, in common with all socialists, agreed with the interconnection between economic security and educative leisure. The

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in John Laurent’s Introduction to, *Tom Mann: Social and Economic Writings*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> William Morris, *Monopoly or how Labour is Robbed*, 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 388.

<sup>4</sup> William Morris, ‘Thoughts on Education Under Capitalism’, *The Commonweal*, 5 June 1888.

<sup>5</sup> E.B. Bax, *The Religion of Socialism*, 54-55.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Equality*, 249.

former created time for the latter, and this stimulated yet further the demand for the former.

### **Parents as they affected children**

Capitalism squeezed or increasingly sought to occupy the workers leisure time. This coupled with a tendency to view the present generation as irredeemably lost to ignorance could lead to a focus on the rising generation. Alan Birkmyre wrote that “of course the chance for this generation is gone, never to return; and we must confine ourselves to what, in present circumstances is possible.”<sup>1</sup> Lowerison also saw that the fight would be won by “the children who come after us.”<sup>2</sup> Another author, in *The Labour Prophet*, argued that it was absurd to expect a generation schooled in individualism to work for socialism and that, therefore, the movement had a duty to campaign for education for the children, and if this was not forthcoming to educate them itself.<sup>3</sup> If adults could not be protected from the ravages of exploitation, or if they would not take action to protect themselves, then the children must be. Children must be guaranteed the ‘elbow room’ in life to attend school, irrespective of their parents’ finances and must be healthy enough to have a chance of learning as much as possible when they got there.

This placed a moral duty on the community to provide for children but it was also the basis for the moral censure of the parents who comprised the community. Parents were the victims of exploitation. However, socialists saw children as being doubly victimised as they were also misused by their parents. Socialists saw a degree of moral culpability in the actions of parents with regard to children which they were quick to condemn although they undoubtedly understood the wider social and economic forces that presented working-class parents with such choices. Working-class parents either de-facto or explicitly, supported the status quo. In *Justice* Harry Quelch wrote that this ‘generosity’ towards the ruling class was all very well, but whilst “you may be generous at your own expense ... you have no right to sacrifice your children.”<sup>4</sup> No one, least of all parents, should be allowed to squeeze the ‘elbow room’ of the children. “For the ideal of

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Birkmyre, *Practicable Socialism*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Lowerison, *In England Now*, 64.

<sup>3</sup> James Simms, ‘The Value of Sunday Schools’, *The Labour Prophet*, June 1897.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Quelch, ‘Free Maintenance for Children’, *Justice*, 27 Jan. 1894.

school implies, in the first place, leisure to learn: that is to say, the release of children from all non-educational labour until mind and physique have had fair start and training.”<sup>1</sup>

The rights of parents over their children, treating them effectively as property within the hallowed private sphere of the liberal world-view, were taken as read by the exponents of all political factions of the ruling class in the late nineteenth century. The Reverend Joseph R. Diggle, the *bête noire* of anyone possessed of an ounce of a progressive tendency on the London School Board, proclaimed the sanctity of these rights.

The State has the right to insist that parents shall not neglect the duties of their position. Parents cannot be permitted to allow their children to be uneducated, unclothed, or unfed. But beyond that point the State cannot interfere without displacing the parent from his proper position. If the State were to determine how the child is to be fed or clothed or educated the rights of the parent, by such action would be effectually extinguished.<sup>2</sup>

In 1893 Hyndman was part of a deputation from the Unemployed Committee that went to see Acland to press for state-funded feeding of children. Acland declined to introduce any such measures stating that he was “reluctant to take any steps that would undermine parental responsibility to tend to weaken home ties.”<sup>3</sup> Socialists sought to limit and control the actions of parents in a variety of ways and it is here that one finds the ideological point of departure for socialism from the ruling orthodoxy with regard to children and the family. Socialists did not accept that parental rights were paramount over any claims of children. In fact the reverse was the case.

Writing to Glasier in April 1886 about the “religion-education-family question”, Morris put the general socialist position. Socialism, he wrote, would transform the family as an institution and would thus eradicate the issue of parental rights. In the meantime “we must be clear about one thing that in opposition to the present Bourgeois view we hold that children are *persons not property*.”<sup>4</sup> Later, in the same month, he continued this theme arguing that “experience has shown me that the parents are the unfittest

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Olivier, ‘Moral’, in, G.B. Shaw, ed., *Fabian Essays*, 159.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph R. Diggle, *School Boards and Voluntary Schools*, 77-78.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Mr Acland and the Schoolchildren’, *Justice*, 11 Feb. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from William Morris to John Bruce Glasier, 24 April 1886. *Letters of William Morris*, N. Kelvin, ed., letter no. 1240. Italics in original.

persons to educate a child; and I entirely deny their right to do so.”<sup>1</sup> Morris was not at all out on limb here. These were the mainstream views of socialism in this period. Charles E. Muse viewed children as “wards of the state”,<sup>2</sup> who needed to be protected from what Annie Besant described as “the carelessness, ignorance and greed of individual parents.”<sup>3</sup> Children were an asset of the whole society and the rights of both the society now and the society of the future, as embodied in the children, had absolute precedence over any rights accorded to an individual by the norms of bourgeois law. “The community has rights of a higher order.”<sup>4</sup> The family was not a safe place for children to be brought up and was even less satisfactory as an institution for discharging the vital, and inherently social function of education. In assuming this position socialists were following in the footsteps of Marx, who in his *Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress of the First International* wrote that capitalism had transformed parents “into slave holders, sellers of their own children” and that, therefore, the rights of children had to be supported against their parents by society.<sup>5</sup>

The simple fact that children and their biological parents lived together did not guarantee that anything desirable would necessarily follow since, “mere aggregation does not breed sympathy.”<sup>6</sup> Margaret Macmillan, I.L.P. member and tireless campaigner for children, agreed. She poured scorn on the idea that the best place for a child was in a family. “Parental Love! A dozen philosophers will exclaim ‘there you have parental love-a great natural force!’ ... This sounds impressive when you hear it for the first time. But it has been proved that Parental Love is a fluctuating thing.”<sup>7</sup> Given the prevailing social and economic system the family was more likely to generate what Morris termed an “accidental tyranny.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from William Morris to William Sharman, 24-30 (?) April 1886. *Letters of William Morris*, N. Kelvin, ed., letter no. 1241.

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Muse, ‘Socialism and Education’, *The Labour Annual*, 1895, 115-6. In this article Muse argued that in order to discharge this duty effectively the state need to be democratised. See, chapter 5, for a fuller discussion of the importance of democracy to socialism in this period.

<sup>3</sup> Annie Besant, ‘The School Board Election’, *Link*, 2 June 1888.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Faith that is in us’, *Woolwich and District Labour Notes*, April 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, ‘Instructions for delegates to the Geneva Congress’, *The First International and After*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Reginald A. Bray, ‘The Boy and his Family’, in, E.J. Urwick, ed., *Studies of Boy Life in our Cities*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Child Labour and the Half Time System*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> William Morris to William Sharman, 24-30 (?) April 1886. *Letters of William Morris*, N. Kelvin, ed., letter no. 1241.



That this tyranny could find fertile ground in the family was, however, no accident. It was a product of the pollution of the family by the spirit and the forms of competitive individualism. "When a family ... sit down to a leg of mutton how do they act?" Morris asked the audience for one of his lectures. "Do they bring in a pair of scales and weigh out to each one his share of the victuals? No that is done in a prison, but not in a family: in a family everybody has what he needs and no one grudges it."<sup>1</sup> There was, however, a vital caveat to this glowing, rose-tinted portrait of family life. The division of plenty, each according to his needs, was utterly dependent upon there being plenty in the first place. Morris was sure that this model of idyllic family co-operation was followed in well-off households. His point was that most households were not well-off and that the rule in those places was more likely to be the devil take the hindmost. The hindmost were the children.

The view of the family put forward here seems to be of an institution that has been depraved by the infiltration of the individualist ethos. This could be taken to imply that, at some time, the family had been otherwise. This, in turn, ran counter to Engels's view of the Family as itself being a product of the private ownership of property. Indeed there were a few socialists who argued, as shall be seen, that it was wrong to give up on the institution as it could be reformed and turned towards useful ends under the prevailing social order. One even specifically addressed Engels's theory and sought to refute it though no mention was made of Engels himself.<sup>2</sup> Such an interpretation of socialism was most definitely the preserve of only the smallest minority. Most, indeed a very large majority, held that the family would be reformed, or rendered superfluous by the advent of socialism. Thus, though, when writing of the family, socialists used phrases such as 'infected by capitalism', there was within this an understanding that the form of the institution was contingent upon the social system within which it operated. A utopian view of some 'golden age' of the family was not being deployed. Rather an understanding of the dynamics of modern society was central when the 'religion-education-family question' was being addressed. In Morris's *News From Nowhere* the visitor was told that one of the causes of the violence prevalent in Victorian society was "the

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, 'What Socialists Want', in, E.D. Lemire, ed., *Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, 231.

<sup>2</sup> See, J.H. Muirhead, *The Family*, 113.

family tyranny ... which once more was the result of private property.”<sup>1</sup> It was from this basic understanding that the prolific socialist author on education, F.J. Gould, wrote that the democratic society for which he worked would “give its anxious thoughts to the bettering of the homes of the poor, in order that the children of the proletariat may commence their education under happier auspices.”<sup>2</sup>

Within the socialism of this period there was also an understanding that the relationship between the family and society was reciprocal. What occurred in society effected what choices were made in the family, therefore, what happened in the family had an effect upon society. It was not a coincidence that the family was placed at the pinnacle of the bourgeois moral world view. This was the place where, socialists thought, children were first inculcated with the mores of the individualist system. It was behind the closed doors of the households of bourgeois society that children were exploited for financial gain, abused and indoctrinated. All of these had the effect of systematically reproducing themselves. However, probably more important, was the whole structural basis of the family. It was a closed world and the privacy of familial relationships was ringed by laws and guarded by the political custodians of order and religion. By definition it was atomistic. It divided people up. It alienated them from their fellows. Thus, if the family was a microcosm of society it was of a society that was terminally diseased. The critical stance adopted by socialism in relation to the family was not, therefore, absolute. What was opposed was not the family as such but rather the family as constituted in late Victorian Britain.

Hostility to the idea that children were the property of their parents was thus central to the socialism of this period. There were, however, a few dissenting voices in the movement. One of these was Harold E. Hare and another was Robert Blatchford. Hare came from Derby and set up a short-lived newspaper called *The Candlestick* to propagate his views. He was an ardent supporter of the family. He saw the atomisation of life under modern urban and industrial capitalism as being a disaster for people since it alienated them from their true selves. He rejected the idea that modern production methods were advantageous and propounded the idea that people ought to be self-sufficient in everything from baking their own bread to educating their own children. He saw socialised education as being both

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 253.

<sup>2</sup> F.J. Gould, *Moral Instruction*, 174.

symptomatic and causative of the modern society from which he sought to retreat. People sent their children to be educated at schools, he argued, because they were too busy to educate them themselves, and because they were told that they had a duty to equip their children with the wherewithal to fight the battles of society as they found it. Although there is much in this analysis with which most of his contemporaries in the movement could concur, his prescriptions were a different matter. Hare advocated a return to a system of parental control over, and instruction of, children in the family home. He seems to have seen elements of the modern industrial system in all social relationships except the family which he perceived as a safe bulwark in his campaign against the modern.<sup>1</sup>

In his highly influential *Merrie England*, Robert Blatchford described the family as “the soundest, the strongest, and the happiest kind of society.” His explanation of this deployed the rhetoric of the standard socialist analysis of capitalism but, like Hare, he saw the family as a haven from this system. Thus:

all the relations of family life are carried on in direct opposition to the principles of political economy and the survival of the fittest. A family is bound by ties of love and mutual helpfulness ... The rule is vested in the parents and not knocked down to the highest bidder ... and each member of the family receives an equal share of the common wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike Morris, Blatchford did not add a caveat limiting such co-operative bliss to the well-to-do. Others may occasionally have made remarks that seem akin to these. F.J. Gould for instance once commented, in some model lessons that he penned for socialist Sunday schools, that “there is enough ‘practical socialism’ in every decent family to provide a foundation for building up future notions in the child’s mind of an ‘ideal society’ of humanity”.<sup>3</sup> Several things need to be noted here. Firstly, such remarks must be set in the context of those quoted earlier which locate this eulogy squarely amidst the need for material improvements to the standard of living of working people. Secondly, Gould added the adjective ‘decent’ to the noun ‘family’ and thus was clearly more akin to Morris than to Blatchford in his thinking. Thirdly, there is a large qualitative difference between writing, as Gould did, that the family can be used as an example to

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<sup>1</sup> See, Harold E. Hare, *The Necessity for a Revolution in Education*, 10-19.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England*, 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Socialist Sunday Schools - A Manual*, 27-28.

illustrate a point in the course of a lesson, and following Blatchford into accepting the family as the ideal institution for the conduct of education. The very fact that Gould was writing lessons to be taught in a school bears this out. Thus, though it would be difficult to understate Blatchford's importance to the movement in general, on this question at this time he was out on a limb.<sup>1</sup>

Socialism thus far more commonly argued that the family was an inherently anti-social organisation. Prior to the N.S.P.C.C.'s inaugural meeting *Justice* noted that the very fact that such a society was recognised as necessary at all was ample testimony to the "complete breakdown of the individualist system."<sup>2</sup> This 'breakdown' assumed three separable, but interconnected forms: brutality, indoctrination and financial exploitation. Each of these will now be examined in turn.

The horrendous domestic cruelty towards children exposed by the newly-formed N.S.P.C.C. led the framers of the *Manifesto of Joint Socialist Bodies* to note that these had dispelled all illusions that "the cruelty and selfishness of the factory and mine have not infected the household". They concluded that society could no more leave its children to the not-so tender ministrations of private ownership than it could leave its land and capital to the stewardship of individual capitalists.<sup>3</sup> John Trevor used the eighth report of the N.S.P.C.C., in 1893, to criticise the type of society that could leave the alleviation of such barbaric brutality to the philanthropy of those with time and money to spare.<sup>4</sup> Parents were penalised by having to pay fines if they absented their children from school, but had to pay school fees when they sent them there. Children were often similarly caught between the devil and the deep sea but the crude and violent nature of the 'catch' and the helplessness of its victims made it all the more odious. Children were beaten at school if they were late or absent and beaten at home if they did not carry out whatever household tasks fell to them.<sup>5</sup> The children were thus penalised at school for the "sins of their parents."<sup>6</sup> Vehement hostility

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<sup>1</sup> Blatchford was at times capable of holding contradictory positions simultaneously. He was, for example, a strong advocate of good quality public education but withdrew his own son from the London School Board system to educate him at home. See the discussion in chapter 3, on the Cinderella Schools, for another example of Blatchford's adoption of contradictory positions.

<sup>2</sup> 'Parental Brutality', *Justice*, 5 July 1884.

<sup>3</sup> *Manifesto of Joint Socialist Bodies*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial in, *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1893.

<sup>5</sup> Honnor Morten, *Inhumanity in Schools*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

towards corporal punishment was one of the defining constituents of any socialist position on education and this hostility was not confined to the practice as executed in schools.

Parental brutality was seen as being rooted in two aspects of the social system. Firstly, there was the brutalising conditions of life in general and secondly, ignorance of both the effects upon children of corporal punishment and of knowledge of alternatives to it with which to train children.<sup>1</sup> Despite this wider understanding it was still *parental* brutality. Systematic and structural poverty ensured that options such as brutality were presented most frequently to parents who were of the working class and, for this reason, such poverty was widely condemned. However, if poverty explained the existence of this option it did not justify its choice. This decision was thus a moral issue. It was the choices made within the leeway offered to people by the system that attracted the moral censure of the socialist movement. Like many other such moral choices the choice of whether to exploit or to educate children could also help, in its own way, in the reproduction of the system in total. The system was thus not analysed wholly as an economic force. The moral was seen to be present in what has since become termed the economic and this simultaneously shaped the framework within which choices were made. The relationship between the moral and the material was thus a reciprocal one.

Socialism was opposed to not only “the exploitation of man by man” but also “to egoisms, to hardships, to all avoidable suffering.”<sup>2</sup> In this instance this meant that socialists were hard on the causes of parental brutality, but they also condemned the brutalisers themselves and, when attempts to shame parents into better behaviour seemed to get nowhere, did not fight shy of advocating the use of the law to protect children. Society had a duty to help its weaker members, but the point is that the late-nineteenth century socialist saw duty as an immediate and personal quality. It was not an abstract concept. It was not something that could or should be delegated to and then exercised by a remote institution (even where such a delegation was proposed it must be noted that such duties were to be given to local and democratic bodies such as school boards). Rather the citizen’s duty to society was to be realised and made manifest, carried out by people in their relationships with their fellows here and now and day to day. As Harry

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, H. Jennie Elcum, ‘Parents and Education’, *The Clarion*, 20 March 1897.

<sup>2</sup> J. Hunter Watts, ‘Socialism, Realist and Idealist’, *Justice*, 2 Nov. 1892.

Lowerison put it, “And damn it, comrades, it’s like this, you know we’re all responsible. We *are* our brothers’ keepers. We’re all one big family. Any child starving in London should be able to claim any one of us as his parent or brother.”<sup>1</sup> It was not just that parents were ignorant, neither was it because they abused or exploited their children (true and important though these charges were) but perhaps primarily because parents were seen to be shirking their duty to society that socialists were so unyielding in their criticism of the role of parents. This meant that there were only a few attempts made by socialists to actually educate parents,<sup>2</sup> the main thrust of socialist agitation being to supplant parents as educators, with socialised education.

Parents also abused, as socialists saw it, their monopolistic control over children, by cramming their minds with falsehoods. The most notable of these (highlighted by Morris’s linkage in the “religious-education-family question”) was religion. Religion had a mutually reinforcing relationship with the family, for the family was “the abiding type of all religious utopias”<sup>3</sup> and it was within the family that religion was first inculcated into the young.

Though late-nineteenth century socialism was highly ethical in its tone and practice and styled itself ‘the new religion’ it was nonetheless overwhelmingly secular in its attitude to established religions. Religious doctrines were, Bax wrote, “utterly despised” by socialism which sought to separate ethics from religion and so bring them back “from heaven to earth”<sup>4</sup>. One of the roots of Lowerison’s socialism was his youthful revulsion at religion. This was to be one of the most enduring elements of all his thought; the same was true of F.J. Gould and as teachers both men made a stand against the teaching of religion in public schools. Lowerison thought that religion bolstered ignorance and superstition and so retarded progress. Moreover, it had a particularly deleterious effect on the minds of children. It not only began the processes of unthinking, irrational obedience to authority that he regarded as the personal habit which most surely “degrades the conscience and the intelligence”<sup>5</sup>; it also turned children into

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Lowerison, ‘What the School Board can do’, *Justice*, 8 July 1893. Italics in original.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of such an attempt, see, Margaret MacMillan, ‘Address to Mothers’, *Bolton and District Independent Labour Pioneer*, Jan. 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Wickstead, *Religion and Society*, 214.

<sup>4</sup> Bax, *The Religion of Socialism*, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, ‘Darwin’s Henchman’, *The Clarion*, 31 May 1912.

stunted, frightened, individuals. He had been made to believe in eternal damnation and it had made his own boyhood a hell on earth.<sup>1</sup> He was determined that others should be spared this trauma and have their eyes opened to the truths of learning based on reason and science, not cant and dogma. “Let us save our children from it. It is the best service we can do them. ... How much of the rampant cruelty of the world to-day is due to that awful ever-present dread? For cruelty is the child of fear.”<sup>2</sup>

In Lowerison’s view religious ministers were either “weak-kneed twaddlers who have never thought straight in their lives”, or, “hypocrites who know their teachings to be a lie, yet go on preaching” about the celestial city while simultaneously living “materialistic lives” themselves.<sup>3</sup> He argued that English religious zealots in the seventeenth century had been little better than vandals, destroying the beauties made by craftsmen of the middle ages,<sup>4</sup> whilst their modern equivalents sought to remove the little pleasure left open to the workers by hammering home the temperance message.<sup>5</sup> Attempts at ‘reform’, such as teetotalism, Lowerison likened to cutting off “ulcers and leaving the deep-seated roots of the malady intact. The fanatics who would absolutely veto our cakes and ale would mostly hold up their hands in pious horror at a Universal Eight Hours Bill.”<sup>6</sup> Thus he saw religion in wholly negative terms. It was a barrier to scientific rationality which he saw as being a necessary precursor of a move towards socialism. Children were terrorised into passivity by religious indoctrination. This cruelty, to which they were subjected as children, produced the fear with which they approached the world as adults, and thus, it was systematically self-replicating.

In arguing that children needed and deserved a secular and rational education Lowerison was not simply effecting what one author has called “a transfer of piety”.<sup>7</sup> The two, the religious and the secular, were qualitatively poles apart. The former sought to entrap the mind in superstition which would alienate the young from fellowship, nature and

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, ‘New Stars - and Bickerton’, *The Clarion*, 19 May 1911. Mrs Elaine Auger, described her Father’s religious upbringing as being of the “narrowest of the narrow”.

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, ‘Fear and Superstition’, *The Clarion*, 16 June 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, ‘Gothic Architecture’, *The Clarion*, 27 Oct. 1911.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, ‘Sermons in Stones’, *The Clarion*, 19 July 1912.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, *In England Now*, 164.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 166.

<sup>7</sup> Peter d’A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914 - Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late Victorian England*, 73.

creativity. The latter sought to liberate them through the power of reason. Moreover, while Lowerison thought that children had to be terrorised through fear of an afterlife of damnation into accepting religion, they responded in a way that was spontaneous, natural and instinctive to the socialist ethical message recognising its justice and fairness.<sup>1</sup>

It was in the area of the financial exploitation of children by their parents that the interstices of the capitalist economic system and the private moral world of the family were at their most blatant. It is, therefore, here also that the links between socialist morality and economics are plainest. It was clear that “the labour of children and young people is but one of the inevitable features of a system which places machinery in the hands of a class for the purposes of class interests.”<sup>2</sup> It was equally clear that in this arena of financial exploitation it was parents who were actually, to re-use Marx’s words, the “sellers”, or perhaps more appropriately, given the legal relationship between the generations, the “slave holders” of their children. There were two basic forms of this misuse. There was the unambiguous, naked selling of children’s labour on the market, whether through the half-time system, or through paid work before, after, or instead of school, and there was the vexed area of the concealed patterns of informal domestic work for their parents. The latter of these will be examined first.

The I.L.P. reported that it was precisely because they considered the home and all that occurred therein to be a private matter that school teachers or managers did not intervene when children were known to be working in their parents’ house when they should have been in school. The party railed against the “petty individualist moralists” who canted on about the parents’ rights while ignoring the fact that this talk concealed the diminution, to the point of extinction, of the child’s rights.<sup>3</sup> The burden of this work, concealed behind the veil of privacy, fell on girls. “It seems to the Mothers only natural that a girl should help to clean, or baby-mind,”<sup>4</sup> while her Mother either got on with the daily grind of chores, or went to work. The excuse was often proffered that working out of school acted as a training for children. This argument had little validity in the paid sphere but in this, the informal, cash-free, child economy, it had none whatsoever. This was not

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, ‘The Toiling Poor’, *The Clarion*, 22 Nov. 1912. See, chapter three.

<sup>2</sup> Enid Stacey, *Education: Its meaning, a socialist point of view*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Commercialism and Child Labour: an indictment and some remedies*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Edith F. Hogg, *School Children as Wage Earners*, 239.



training it was drudgery. Pamela Horn has shown the disastrous effects that this had on the education of girls. At the start of this period around 20% of women were unable to sign their name when they got married as against 15% of men.<sup>1</sup> Rather than seeing this work as training, socialists viewed it as a barrier to training. Carpenter wrote that “the curtailing of Boy and Girl labour would, of course, not only cause an extra demand for adult labour, but would give an extra opportunity for the methodical technical training of young folk, and turning them out into the world as efficient citizens - a most important matter.”<sup>2</sup>

Girls of school age carried over the ‘skills’ thus learned at home into the sphere of paid child employment. A survey by the Women’s Industrial Council, in 1897, found that of 26,000 children questioned 532 girls admitted to being involved in paid work. The most common form of work cited by these respondents who admitted to working for money was baby-minding, which was undertaken, for payment, by 135 girls. Other tasks commonly performed included house cleaning (115) and running errands (140). The jobs carried out by the 729 boys who admitted to working for cash included selling newspapers (102), shop work (313), running errands (134) and hawking (56).<sup>3</sup>

Parents, particularly in the earlier years of this period, were often opposed to the very idea of sending their children to school. Even when, or if, attendance became more habitual it could be nonetheless grudging due to the perceived cultural difference between the world of the school and that of the working-class community. Contact between the adults on either side of this divide could be, at best, institutional and formalistic, and at worst, resentful and antagonistic. As one parent recalled of his visits to a school,

you’d see this bloody Glen-Smith fellow and he’d look at you and bloody hum and bloody haw and he’d give you no encouragement at all, none whatsoever, not a bloody bit ... we might be poor folk around this way, but we’ve as much bloody rights as any other buggers in this town to get the job done properly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Horn, *The Education and Employment of Working-Class Girls, 1870-1914*, 71. The gap was only narrowed towards the end of the century to 3.2% of women and 2.8% of men.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Industrial Freedom*, 35.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Child Labour’, *The School Board Gazette*, Feb. 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Standish Meacham, *A Life Apart: the English Working Class 1890-1914*, 174-175, and f/n 86, 255.

This has been presented by one author as a defence of the norms of the working-class community against the imposition of middle-class value systems and a strongly hostile reaction to the, often brutal, institutionalised flogging of children in schools. No socialist would have sought to criticise parental opposition to state education on this latter ground. However, there was more to working-class opposition to education than this. The same author also mentions, but glosses over, another strand to parents' opposition to compulsory schooling. This was based on the fact that it prevented them, the parents, from sending their children to work with quite the degree of flexibility to which they were accustomed and attached.<sup>1</sup>

The second form of financial exploitation of children was that conducted for money. The most prevalent type of work undertaken by children was done on a casual basis. Socialists were implacably aligned against this. Child labour was little more than the systematic manufacturing of the unemployed of the future. The child, who received all his 'training' in youth in the no-skill jobs of street hawking and the like would graduate to become members of "the great restless sea of unskilled, ill-paid labour, for which no certain market can be found, or they become a burden on the community in the still darker depths of pauperism and crime."<sup>2</sup> The abuse of children in this way thus cut to the roots of the system which was effecting a twofold abuse upon society. Firstly, the youngest and most vulnerable of its members were being degraded and exploited in the most morally shameless of manners with the further knock-on effect of reducing the general level of wages. Secondly, when these youngsters became adults not only would they be fit only for these same low wage, no-skill tasks, but they would also be uneducated and so prolong the existence of the system that condemned them to a life of poverty and powerlessness.

This transition from child street-seller to adult member of the residuum was illustrated by figures published by the I.L.P. showing that of 6,095 boys who left school in 1893-4 in East London, 2,519 went into casual work. For South London the figures were 4,882 out of 10,324. Outside the metropolis the same pattern was repeated. Ipswich sent one half of its boy school-leavers to work as newsboys, errand boys or cart-boys, whilst in Portsmouth 'errand boy' was the occupation of 265 out of 832 boy school-

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<sup>1</sup> See, Philip W. Gardiner, *Working Class Private Schools in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>2</sup> *Commercialism and Child Labour: an indictment and some remedies*, 9.

leavers.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the effects of this type of work on both the child's and society's future prospects there was the issue of the moral effect such work had on children. The I.L.P. were under no illusions about how unpleasant life in a slum household could be for children but argued that though the children needed to be removed from the hearth, doing so simply to employ them as street-sellers, or errand-runners in pubs was to actually make matters worse.<sup>2</sup> It could, for example, lead young girls who begun a life on the streets as match-sellers into child prostitution.<sup>3</sup>

The Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Children Act of 1903 found that the money "so readily made" by children engaged in street-trading was "spent with equal dispatch. The children spend it on sweets and cigarettes, and in attending music-halls, and in very many cases only a portion, if any, of the daily earnings is taken home."<sup>4</sup> Thus the establishment view of the evils of working children was bound up with a perception of the urgent need to encourage the habits of frugality and thrift that alone could save these children from a future where the prison or the workhouse loomed large.

That the money brought home by child workers was, contrary to the Government's received wisdom, vital to the domestic budgets of many of the poorest was beyond doubt to any socialist. A survey of 36 street-trading children undertaken by the Manchester Watch Committee found that none of the children spent their earnings in the frivolous manner so condemned by the Government. In fact all these children gave this money to their families.<sup>5</sup> George Haw, in a fictionalised account, *A Lad of London*, recounted the apocryphal tale of 'Timmo' a young lad who, according to his Mother, got up at four in the morning to work with the stableman and then after school 'helped out' at the local barbers. 'Timmo' had come to the attention of the author as he had been absent for three weeks from the boys' mission where the narrator worked. Upon investigation it transpired that the lad was dying of consumption. The lack of his wages meant that his

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 7 & 9.

<sup>3</sup> 'Street Trading by Children', *The School Board Gazette*, Jan. 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in, E. Royston Pike, ed., *Human Documents of the Lloyd George Era*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> 'Child Labour', *The School Board Gazette*, Feb. 1899.

Mother had been unable to bury the body of Timmo's sibling that had thus lain in their home for over a week.<sup>1</sup>

This examination of the connection between the family and the economic system has been centred upon child labour in its urban setting. Often, because it was dispersed and therefore often hidden from view, the situation in the countryside was, if such a thing can be imagined, actually worse. Here education, and school boards where they existed, were, like many aspects of rural society, under the tutelage of the squirearchy and farmers. Taking as its example the Hundred of East Tendring on the Essex coast, *Justice* wrote that here, in 1884, "the farmers wield the wand of authority before which the schoolmaster's birch must bow".<sup>2</sup> The Government in London may have decided to raise the standard of education but where this was found to be incompatible with the farmers' 'duty' to force young lads out at dawn into the fields to scare crows then the apocryphal 'Farmer Hodge' was not a man to shrink from this duty. In East Tendring this was accomplished by the abolition of the requirement to pass any standard at all before going to work, which effectively condemned these children to a life of illiteracy.

Such desperately grinding poverty could be used to explain the existence of child workers but socialists could never accept the legitimacy of this explanation. There simply was no excuse for child labour. Harry Bird, a socialist who was elected to the Walthamstow School Board, grasped the nettle of this problem when he spoke in favour of raising the school-leaving age.

There is no doubt that it will affect injuriously some widows - indeed, we have had such cases before us - but what are we to do? Our duty is to see that the children are properly educated. It simply shows the futility of piecemeal reforms. The logical outcome is this: if the community declares that the children must be educated, and it is found that such compulsion injuriously affects some of the parents, it is the DUTY of the community to make provision against such injury.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Haw, *A Lad of London*, 14-15. In this story the narrator was a worker at the Shadwell Boys' Mission. In reality George Haw is listed as a supporter of the National Cinderella Society by the *Cinderella Annual* of 1903. Manchester Local Studies Unit, 362.7C28.

<sup>2</sup> 'School Boards in Arcady', *Justice*, 26 Jan. 1884.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Walthamstow School Board - The Socialist Member's Report to his Constituents', *The Socialist Critic*, 23 June 1900. Capitals in original. The widows to whom he makes reference are probably war widows from the Boer War. Harry Bird kept up a remarkable correspondence with his electors through this newspaper, which his branch of the S.D.F. seems to have produced solely for this purpose. In later

The analysis of child casual labour was thus firmly rooted within the broader understanding of the capitalist system. It was for this reason that Harry Quelch wrote that “any agitation, therefore, for the abolition of child-labour must be accompanied by an equally vigorous agitation for the free maintenance of all school children, as a public right, up to the age of 16.”<sup>1</sup>

Child labour was the worst component of the late-nineteenth century social system but within child labour the half-time system stood out and received the special searing, hostility it deserved. In simple terms the level of exploitation witnessed under the half-time system was undeniably appalling, but it was not only this element that so enraged socialists. For what the system represented was nothing less than an unholy alliance between the state, which had to give its imprimatur in the form of a half-time certificate, and those trade unions which campaigned for the maintenance of half-timism. Crushed between the engines of the working class and the engines of society at large were the children. Not all unions were at the apogee of callousness that this represented, but the best were battered by the example of the worst. T.U.C. delegations presenting the government with demands to raise the age of exemption at which half-time certificates could be granted could find themselves rebuffed “with the suggestion that a major obstacle to such a move was the workers themselves.”<sup>2</sup> Such was the reception given to a deputation to the Home Secretary, Asquith, in 1895 that included Margaret MacMillan as a representative of the Bradford School Board which had just voted by ten to four for a resolution to petition to raise the age for half-timers. They were heard by the minister who clearly thought he was delivering the coup de grace to his visitors’ arguments when he produced a letter from the Huddersfield Operative Cotton Spinners’ Association “declaring that nothing would induce them to consent to the raising of the age from eleven to twelve.” To which the Right Honourable Gentleman added, “so with reference to Lancashire, I don’t think I am exaggerating when I say that almost all the large organisations of textile workers in Lancashire have protested against this change.”<sup>3</sup>

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editions Bird gave examples of parents coming before the Board to seek exemption certificates for their children. See, for example, ‘The Walthamstow School Board - The Socialist Member’s Monthly Report to his Constituents’, *The Socialist Critic*, 30 Nov. 1900.

<sup>1</sup> Harry Quelch, ‘Child Labour and Free Maintenance’, *Justice*, 14 Aug. 1897.

<sup>2</sup> Clive Griggs, *The Trades Union Congress and Education*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Half timers in Factories’, *The Bradford Observer*, 10 April 1895. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A7/1.

Under the half-time system children who were in possession of the certificate attended school for half a day only and were released for paid employment for the remainder. The stronghold of this system was in Lancashire. Here cotton spinners were paid on a piece-work basis and employed children to help them paying them, in turn, from their own earnings. Therefore, the lower the price of the 'helpers' labour the better for the spinner himself. The front-line exploiter of the child was thus, not the mill owner, but rather the adult worker. This system was attended by an almost unbelievable level of hypocrisy, which was paraded in the pages of *The Schoolmaster's* special supplement on the half-time system in February 1895 wherein the following two quotations were juxtaposed thus<sup>1</sup> :

### A CONTRAST

Bolton spinners on themselves.

The Bolton Operative Spinners in their annual Report, thus describe the conditions of the minder: "*In addition to these disadvantages he has to labour in a temperature ranging from 80 to 110 Fahr, and in a vitiated atmosphere, which is not completely changed even once a week. These conditions render him peculiarly liable to contracting chest complaints and rheumatic affections.*"

Bolton spinners on their children.

The Bolton Operative Spinners declare: "*That this meeting of representative operative spinners, having carefully considered the proposal to raise the age for half-timers from 10 to 12 years, is strongly of the opinion that such amendment is totally uncalled for in the interest of the child itself, as speaking with a full knowledge of the question, we do hereby assert that a child does not suffer, either physically or intellectually, as a result of becoming a half-timer; and we would, therefore respectfully urge upon the Government not to accede to the demand put forward for raising the age of partial exemption.*"

There were, as shall be shown in the next chapter, very significant differences between the underlying analysis of educational issues by the N.U.E.T./N.U.T. and socialists. This chasm was highlighted on the half-time question by the union's use of the argument that one reason for condemning the system was because it removed the children from their parents' authority leading to the situation whereby "the command 'children obey your parents' gives place to 'Parents obey your children' or they will leave home."<sup>2</sup> Upsetting what the union clearly saw as the God-given order of the generations was, of course, precisely the object of most socialists.

However, socialists could make some degree of common cause with the teachers on this question and certainly could accept, and more often than not quote, the teachers union's raw data on the system, adding to it the findings of various factory and school inspectors.<sup>3</sup> Thus, *The Labour*

<sup>1</sup> Special Supplement to *The Schoolmaster*, Feb. 1895.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* This argument was also used by Richard Waddington in his, *The Half Time System as it Affects the Education of Girls*. Thus, "the child is allowed to cultivate a spirit of independence through the influence of the weekly wage, that brooks all parental control." 7.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, 'The Modern Massacre of the Innocents', *Justice*, 16 April 1898. Thus, "the N.U.T. deserves credit for having called attention to some of the evils of this monstrous system, and their work in

*Leader* noted that the factory inspector when visiting Dundee reported that, “children of poorer physique than the Dundee half-timers I have not seen anywhere.”<sup>1</sup> The paper denied any claims that parents acted in this manner because they were greedy, the nexus of the issue lay in the distribution of economic and political power. “The curse of being poor carries a terrible punishment with it”<sup>2</sup> in the form of the sacrifice of the children the paper continued. But socialists, though undeniably sympathetic still sought to eradicate the parents’ right to send their children to work. Ideally this would, as Harry Bird had stressed, (see above) occur as a part of the widespread reform of society. But if needs be it was argued that it should be pushed through as the first stage of reform even if it disadvantaged the parents concerned.<sup>3</sup> What was of absolute and paramount importance was the ending of the “the modern massacre of the innocents.”<sup>4</sup>

Socialists, almost without exception, rejected the idea that the family under capitalism was fit to hold an educative role. The corollary of this was that socialised education was vital. If the contemporary education system reproduced contemporary society, it was felt that a different education system would, at least help in the formation of a different society. This was shown clearly by the short poem written on the masthead of *The Cinderella Supplement to The Labour Prophet*:

For, be sure the new things grow  
As the old things fade  
As we train the children; so  
Is the future made.  
That shall reign when we are low  
All the work we would have wrought  
Must by them be done;  
We shall pass, but not our thoughts  
While in every one  
Lives the lesson that we taught.<sup>5</sup>

This is, however, to leave open the whole question of what kind of education was deemed capable of fulfilling this role, precisely what thoughts should be passed on to the next generation? These questions will

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this direction will be most useful to us in our agitation for the suppression of the modern system of massacring the innocents.”

<sup>1</sup> ‘Child Labour’, *The Labour Leader*, 28 July 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Sidney E. Dark, ‘Socialists and Education’, *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Modern Massacre of the Innocents’, *Justice*, 16 April 1898.

<sup>5</sup> *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1895.

be examined in detail in subsequent chapters. However, an examination of the broad outlines will be useful at this point as it throws light on what socialists saw as the inadequacies of the family or parents as the providers of education.

Education freed from the trammels of commercialism on the one hand and superstition on the other, would become a reasonable drawing out of men's varied faculties in order to fit them for a life of social intercourse and happiness; for mere work would no longer be proposed as the end of life, but happiness for each and all.<sup>1</sup>

Inside each individual therefore, was a series of unique talents, desires and attributes which it was the role of true education to foster and nurture. Only truly developed individuals like these could be truly social. Existing education, *The Socialist* wrote, was "content to place a rude intellectual instrument in the hands of a still uneducated person." Whereas, "true education should aim at equipping the whole individual with power to live a many-sided life."<sup>2</sup> Like most in the socialist movement *The Labour Prophet* concurred with this stating that, "the development of individuality, of will power, of varying capacity is pre-eminently necessary".<sup>3</sup> This was a dominant feature of all socialist utopian projections. It was more than part of a wish list. It was necessary under the existing system to struggle to reform the education system so as to develop the individual along truly social lines that he or she might desire yet more freedom. The development of the individual was thus the means as well as the ends of the struggle. Socialist educational principles "must not only satisfy certain needs of the individual life, they must also be sufficient, when generally applied, to *gain* for society all that is possible of attainment in the direction of bringing the accumulated best experiences of all to bear upon every social question."<sup>4</sup>

## **The Family and Education in socialist society**

Utopian descriptions of life under a reformed social system were quite common as a form of expression in this period. It is proposed to examine the works of six authors here. These are: William Morris (*News From Nowhere*), Edward Bellamy (*Looking Backwards* and its sequel *Equality*),

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<sup>1</sup> Bax and Morris, *The Manifesto of the Socialist League*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> 'School Board Election', *The Socialist*, Dec.-Jan. 1894-95.

<sup>3</sup> S.G. Hobson, 'Labour and Education', *The Labour Prophet*, July 1894.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Burrows, 'Social Democracy and Education', *Justice*, 13 Oct. 1888. Emphasis added.



Maria Sales (*The Master Key of Social Reform*), John Richardson (*It can be done*), Henry Lazarus (*The English Revolution of The Twentieth Century*), and Laurence Gronlund (*The Co-operative Commonwealth*). They are useful for, as Morris wrote in his review of Bellamy's first and most famous contribution to the genre, *Looking Backward*, "the only safe way of reading a utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author."<sup>1</sup> An examination of the individual temperaments displayed in these works is remarkably indicative of one aspect of the 'religion-education-family question'. All socialist utopian projections relegated the social roles of parents. This is all the more remarkable when one considers the very great differences that are obvious between the broader prescriptions of these works.

This wider difference was clearly visible in the agent that effected the removal of parents from the care and education of their children. Morris's utopia was a work of fiction in which the narrator woke up to find himself in the future. The society which he encountered was deinstitutionalized with an absence of conflict, money, property, politics and the state. Adults had free rein to develop as they wanted and so, naturally, passed this right on to their children. The focus here was on the link between the moral and the material development of people. The eradication of want and greed allowed people to develop their individuality along truly social lines. Edward Bellamy, John Richardson and Maria Sales, on the other hand, each produced a vision of the future that was statist in the extreme. Only Bellamy wrote in the form of a novel. The other two laid out painstakingly elaborate plans for their envisaged society. In each of these the reader was left in no doubt that the agent effecting the withdrawal of parents from education was not so much the parents themselves as the state. Rationality was not internalised, as in *News From Nowhere*, so it was imposed and monitored. Each of their works represent a hierarchical, bureaucratic managerialism tempered with meritocratic trimmings that placed the emphasis far more on the efficiency of society than on the morality and justice of relations between its members. As such they have much in common with the works of Sidney Webb and this similarity meant that these works were located at the fringes of British socialism in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Given this fringe location it is perhaps all the more remarkable that they should come to the same conclusion on the subject of the family as Morris.

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, 'Looking Backward', *The Commonweal*, 22 June 1889, 124.

Henry Lazarus's somewhat bizarre contribution<sup>1</sup> to this literature fell somewhere between Morris's and the others'. It is written (as its subtitle makes clear) in the form of a 'Prospective History' casting its eye back over the "Jubilee Age" of the nineteenth century from the vantage point of a post-revolutionary Britain in the twentieth century. The society had a state but this was under the democratic control of the people. Board schools, still controlled by the ballot, for example, administered the entire education system. If Morris's vision was of a communal and non-statist society then Lazarus's could be seen as a half-way house. Therefore, the focus was more upon the development and extension of the reforms to society that late-nineteenth century socialists called 'palliatives', such as the provision of free school meals within a compulsory and free education system, for example. Though no mention was made of the role of the family there was an implicit relegation from the elevated position it occupied in the Diggleite world-view.

Morris's fundamental position was that the ability to reason was innate in all people. It was indeed one of the defining characteristics that differentiated people from animals. This ability was not spread equally amongst the people but it could be developed or retarded in all or any of them alike.<sup>2</sup> In *News From Nowhere* he described a society which allowed people free rein to do just that, and develop themselves to the extent of their own natural abilities. Education reflected and reinforced the pattern of social organisation and was thus de-institutionalised. People's tastes were not forced and the children were not encouraged to become too 'bookish'. Crafts and practical skills, such as thatching, mowing, cooking, carpentry and swimming were developed. Most people could manage French, German, Welsh, Irish, Latin and Greek.<sup>3</sup> The parental role had all but disappeared in the conventional sense of the word. Families, being bound by no legal or social coercion stayed together for as long as any affection lasted. The children were free to come and go as they pleased and were to be frequently found living communally on their own in the woods.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The English revolution of the twentieth century was led by one Carlyle Democritus and began on 14 Feb. 19-- (this being, of course, St. Valentine's Day!)

<sup>2</sup> William Morris, 'What Socialists Want', in, E.D. Lemire, ed., *Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, 218 & 219.

<sup>3</sup> William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 206-208.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 253.

In Bellamy's Boston at the end of the twentieth century, the people were dragooned under the benign despotism of an 'industrial army' which administered all social functions, particularly the education of the young. The necessary social values for this society were instilled by means of this education system. One grade of this seems to have been particularly important, as Julian West (the 'sleeper' who wakes up in the future) was told by his guide Dr Leete. "This grade is a sort of school and a very strict one, in which the young men are taught habits of obedience, subordination and devotion to duty."<sup>1</sup> These were precisely those attitudes that the society considered virtuous. Implicit in this increased educative role for the state was a commensurate decline in the educative role of the family.

Like Bellamy, Laurence Gronlund was an American. Gronlund's *The Co-operative Commonwealth* contained many suggestions for the conduct of an education system all of which highlight why his work was praised by *Seed-time* whilst Bellamy's was damned. For example he voiced the common British socialist hostility to children being awarded prizes at school whereas Bellamy portrayed a system which liberally be-decked children in prize ribbons. Gronlund was also very clear that the social provision of education should be seen as part of a critique of the norms of the bourgeois family. He asked his readers,

now please do not misunderstand the socialist position in this respect! We do not make war on the *family*; on the contrary, our aim is to enable every healthy man and woman to form a family. But we do make war on family-*exclusiveness* - perhaps a better word than 'selfishness' - on family-*prejudice* and family-*narrowness*.<sup>2</sup>

In Richardson's vision the relegation of the role of parents was explicit. In his bureaucrat's paradise, "no parents who chose to educate and train their own children would be prevented from doing so, so long as they did educate and train them properly."<sup>3</sup> In other words they could do it, but only as long as they did it in precisely the way that it was done in public schools. Richardson favoured removing children from their parents to state-run, residential training and education institutions. These would be so obviously beneficial to the children that all parents would rush to place their children

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 105.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, 224.

<sup>3</sup> John Richardson, *It can be done -or- Constructive Socialism*, 123.

inside them.<sup>1</sup> He set out a very long and laboriously detailed syllabus for these schools which would not only cover all academic and technical subjects but would also be self-supporting colonies capable of providing all their own food and services. Contact could be maintained between parents and children by letters and by visits. If parents could not be bothered to do this then it would be so much the better for all concerned that the children were thus removed from their ‘care’.<sup>2</sup>

Maria Sales was an even more enthusiastic advocate of separating children from the disruptive influence of their parents. She expressly ruled out the options of the state giving aid to parents, or of giving them the option of sending their children to state schools. Rather she favoured making it “obligatory for *all* children to receive the State education and maintenance.”<sup>3</sup> In her scheme contact between parents and children would be limited to Sundays and holidays, and on these occasions would be closely supervised and even then her chief criteria seems to have been that it would save the state money if parents were occasionally allowed to cook meals at home for their children. The beneficial effects of economies of scale are never far from the surface in her work.<sup>4</sup> Any remaining control parents had over children would be rigidly monitored and policed. Mothers who sold their child’s clothing rations, would, for example, be thrown out of their housing.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

In his *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888-1906* David Howell reaches the conclusion that “there was little attempt at a detailed study by socialists of existing economic or social arrangements”, adding that such attempts at investigation were typically the preserve of interventionist Liberals.<sup>6</sup> Howell seems to imply that socialists did not use statistical methods and this chapter must conclude that this was not the case.<sup>7</sup> The findings

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, 123-124.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Sales, *The Master Key of Social Reform*, 37. Italics in original.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888-1906*, 352.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of socialist use of statistics on child labour, education and related issues see, for example, Dan Irving, ‘Child Labour and Education’, *The Social Democrat*, 1899, especially page 272. Also, Allen Clarke, ‘The Effects of the Factory System - Part 4’, *The Clarion*, 29 Jan. 1898.

presented on the policy areas of education and child labour mean that one must conclude that socialists were passionately concerned about social questions and devoted much time and effort to analysing them. The socialist press of the 1880s and 1890s carried numerous articles listing detailed statistical evidence of the number of children going hungry to school for example. Indeed given that the movement was largely amateur and that the socialist press of the time abounds with hand-wringing self-criticisms of how little time grass-roots activists could devote to campaigning at elections, the time spent on researching and writing up such works as the ILP's own *Commercialism and Child Labour: An Indictment and Some Remedies* is all the more notable. Even when they did not produce their own data the movement showed itself more than willing to pounce upon that produced by others such as the N.U.T. or the factory inspectors.

Howell's critique is therefore mistaken insofar as it is based on what he sees as the absence of statistical data from socialist arguments. However, his approach also seems to degrade, indeed to ignore, the socialist moral critique of the system. That socialist morality was often harshly critical of the working class may make their rhetoric resemble that deployed by liberal or even Tory philanthropists. But rather than view this as another edge to the sword used by the middle classes (be they liberal, Tory or Socialist) to hack at the norms of the working-class community it is important to contextualise this moral critique within the socialist comprehension of reciprocal relationship between the 'moral' and the 'material'. Just as the system was defended not only by political economists but also by moralists so it was attacked on both these fronts by socialism. Given this understanding it is possible to view this 'religion of humanity' not only as a sign of ideological continuity with other existing trends but also as a departure from these. That socialist morality shared language, tone or form with other competing world views can, once its systematic base is borne in mind, be seen, not as a weakness, or a dilution, but as a strength. The prevailing social system was defended not only by the exponents of orthodox political economy but also by the morality mongers of the various Christian denominations. Bax recognised that the power of such religious thinking had, by the 1880s and 1890s, been weakened by the advance of science and free thinking. Notwithstanding this recognition he was at pains to point out that this did not mean that religion "is no longer to be regarded as an active enemy". Socialists had an obligation to make frontal attacks on

religion “whenever the occasion presents itself.”<sup>1</sup> If capitalism was the result of economic forces and moral choices so too must socialism be sought through material change and moral improvement. This was the meaning of the religion of humanity.

The often strident and condemnatory moral tone of this socialism can serve to highlight the ambivalent relationship between socialist thought and the norms of the working class. There was clearly a tension operating between the two with points of criticism and censure but these were balanced by areas of contact and support. There was thus a degree of creativity and flexibility in the relationship between the class and the movement, there was, indeed, a relationship, with all the degrees of built-in discord and rancour, but also support and strength, that the term implies. Socialists criticised working-class parents for exploiting and beating their children, but when the right to do this was transferred to teachers, by way of the doctrine of ‘*loco parentis*’, socialists found themselves on the same side as these parents. It is to this alignment on this related question of the role of teachers that attention must now be turned.

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<sup>1</sup> Bax, ‘The Bourgeois Radical Movement and Socialism’, in, Bax, *Essays in Socialism Old and New*, 239-240.

# CHAPTER 2

## Socialism, education and teachers

A flogging schoolmaster is also an evil example to his scholars and a danger in that way; a boy strives after the manly - the man he is brought into contact with, the man he meets, as it were, in business for the first time, is his schoolmaster, and he naturally regards him as a typical man and makes him his model. If his schoolmaster be a tyrant, he implants in him the germs of tyranny. The influence which a schoolmaster's character and general disposition have upon his pupils is wonderful. 'Corporal Punishment in Schools', *The Social Democrat*, vol. III, 1899, 318.

When he was reflecting upon his days as a schoolmaster in the pages of *The Labour Leader*, the celebrated German socialist Wilhelm Liebknecht wrote that “during my political life, I have been told a hundred times after a speech or lecture, ‘you are a schoolmaster still’” and added wryly that “it was not always meant as a compliment.”<sup>1</sup> Given that socialists rooted their explanation of the powerlessness of the working class in their ignorance, the fact that Liebknecht's socialist audience should consider that his acting like a teacher merited censure or abuse should not have surprised him. Teachers were heavily implicated as the knowing accomplices of an educational system which propped up the status quo.

Just as socialists were united in the belief that education could be an engine of progress so they concurred that these benefits were, like all the good things of life, if not monopolised, then certainly most thoroughly exploited, by the rich.<sup>2</sup> Ernest Parke advocated the non-payment of the ‘school pence’ as a direct protest against the siphoning off of tax revenues paid by the majority of the people to benefit the education of the rich, a theme echoed by the S.D.F. thus:

the children of the Liberal and Tory members of Parliament are trained at the nursery, grounded at the grammar school, educated at the college, polished at the university, and

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Liebknecht, ‘My Schoolmaster Days’, *The Labour Leader*, 25 August 1900.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, ‘Manifesto of the Socialist Union’, *The Socialist*, July 1886.

finished off by a nice little 'trip round the world.' All this is paid for by ... the workers generally whose little ones, at an early age, are taken from school and thrust into the factory to become slaves for the children of the wealthy classes.<sup>1</sup>

Such appropriation was systematic in nature as H.W. Hobart recognised when, in the columns of *Justice*, he noted that "we fear very much that those who have received the advantages of education, know only too well what it is worth, and decide on those grounds to keep the monopoly as close as possible."<sup>2</sup>

But "as close as possible" was not entirely closed which meant that the ruling class had to control the education delivered to the working class in such a manner as to ensure its continuing function within the capitalist system. This meant that teachers were allocated a pivotal role by the defenders of the status quo. Similarly, because of their emphasis on education, socialists also viewed teaching as an important role in society. The level of potential importance attached to teachers by socialists, and the consequent feeling that a social duty was being betrayed by the positions adopted by teachers within the education system, went a long way to explain the vehemence with which teachers were criticised by socialists.

In addressing the precise manner in which education supported the capitalist system various socialists stressed different aspects of the education system. However, there was nonetheless an underlying unity in the belief that the education served up by teachers did not serve the best interests of the working class. Therefore, to get to the root of the antipathy that produced such comments as those of Liebknecht's listeners this chapter will firstly, locate the socialist view of the existing educational system and, secondly, highlight those pedagogic practices and institutional structures of the system that attracted the most attention from socialists for which responsibility could be assigned to the teachers and their trade unions. Particular attention will be paid to the issue of corporal punishment. Lastly the socialist view of the ideal teacher will be examined.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Parke, *Free Education -or- why pay the school pence? A question for ratepayers and workmen*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> H.W. Hobart, 'Education VI - Summary', *Justice*, 11 Aug. 1894.



## **Socialism and the place of teachers in the existing education system**

As a general picture of how socialists perceived the educational system at work that given by Katherine St John Conway at the beginning of her *The Road to Socialism* has rarely been bettered.

It was a hot day in June. The windows of the schoolroom were all wide open, and the sunshine was making dazzling golden ladders among the leaves of the trees. The children were longing to be out in the woods or in the daisy meadows. They were weary of the dull walls that shut them in, and sat with half-closed eyes, dreaming of worlds where there could be no 'grown ups' to come between them and the Summer's giving up of good things. The teacher rapped sharply with his cane upon the desk. 'Define a straight line' he said. Mechanically the little lips opened. 'A straight line is the shortest distance between two points,' they sang in a monotone together. And then they sighed for that their little feet could not straightaway tread the line which led from where they were to where they would be.<sup>1</sup>

Kean has concluded that socialists "failed to provide an oppositional stance ... towards state education."<sup>2</sup> There are two elements to this conclusion. The first concerns socialist attitudes towards the state, the second highlights socialist positions vis-a-vis the state's provision of education. This study will draw opposing conclusions on both points. Chapter five will show how socialists were able to construct a political position that was based on a highly critical view of the state. They were also able to construct a detailed critique of the education system. In fact this went beyond simply proposing alternatives to the actual implementation of these plans and schemes through their own educational initiatives (see chapter 3). With regard to their relations with teachers socialists dissected out four aspects of the system onto which their criticism of teachers could be focused or upon which a sympathetic platform could be built. These included, firstly, payment by results and its hated progeny of examinations, cramming and corporal punishment. There was also the issue of the size of classes (or to put it another way- the understaffing of schools). The syllabus and lastly, the terms of employment of teachers and particularly the religious influence over and within education were also issues of great importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine St John Conway, *The Road to Socialism*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Hilda Kathleen Kean, *State Education Policy 1900-1930*, 142.

The first of these aspects of the education system, payment by results, was detested by all socialists. It was seen as the direct result of the application of the capitalist ethos to education “out of the monetary basis comes that abomination, ‘payment by results’.”<sup>1</sup> This system, which “made a tradesman of the teacher”<sup>2</sup>, amounted to the application of ‘sweating’ to education and was widely seen as the underpinning of many of the other evils of the system. Thus, when it supported the strikes of school children against the over use of home-lessons by teachers, *Justice* noted that “these are the necessary concomitant of the payment by results.”<sup>3</sup> Payment by results focused all eyes upon the examination. This, together with the understaffing of schools, meant that it was inevitable that teachers would try to cram their pupils for the examinations upon which their own livelihoods were crucially dependent. As well as spawning the methodology most likely to stifle all initiative and individuality in its recipients, payment by results also reduced the moral tone of the school and education. It locked teachers into a structure wherein they were effectively out to cheat the examiner, which thus destroyed their “sense of honour and personal responsibility.”<sup>4</sup> Examinations were seen as occupying a similar place vis-a-vis education as Frankenstein’s monster did to its creator: destroying that which they had been devised to support.<sup>5</sup>

Cramming for exams was not education in any sense of the word as used by any socialist. Hobart laid into the system thus:

The day arrives. The most likely children are selected for certain subjects. The inspector proceeds to examine a school of three or four hundred children in a few hours. What is the result? The prominent children in particular subjects answer the parrot-like questions with parrot-like accuracy and ‘pass’, taking with them others who have not been personally examined by the inspector. The whole thing is a farce, a mere stage army procession. After the examinations, almost everything is forgotten, and every nerve is strained to prepare the likely ones for the next examination.<sup>6</sup>

Driven by payment by results and the examination system teachers sweated, coaxed and cajoled their pupils and, when these tactics did not work, or

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<sup>1</sup> ‘To Teachers in Elementary Schools’, *Justice*, 23 Aug. 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret MacMillan, ‘Schools and School Boards’, *The Clarion*, 20 July 1901.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Strikes of School Children’, *Justice*, 19 Oct. 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret MacMillan, ‘Schools and School Boards’, *The Clarion*, 20 July 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Harrison, *The Sacrifice of Education*, 646.

<sup>6</sup> H.W. Hobart, ‘Education (part two) - Elementary’, *Justice*, 7 July 1894.

when strained patience snapped, they employed the cane. Corporal punishment was the means widely used to ensure the production of the desired ends. Teachers were not held responsible for the institutional framework of education; they were, however, accountable for the choices they made, or positions they adopted within this given framework. Socialists highlighted this in the area of corporal punishment where they demanded that teachers accept responsibility for their own actions.

The second main focus of socialist opposition to the education system was the underfunding and consequent understaffing of schools. The large classes condoned by the system meant that real education was impossible. Teachers could not get to know their pupils and so could only dole out more of the same, depressingly uniform cramming. This could attract some sympathy from socialists. George Gale, campaigning as an “avowed socialist” in a Leeds School Board election on behalf of the I.L.P. and other socialist organisations, wrote on his handbills that the teachers “will always have my warmest sympathies for they are often harassed by ... large classes.”<sup>1</sup> *Justice* stated clearly that “it is manifestly impossible for one teacher properly to ‘teach’ a class from fifty to seventy pupils.”<sup>2</sup> Given such numbers the best that a teacher could reasonably hope to do was to “manage” the children. Education, in any real sense of the word, was out of the question. Harry Lowerison was in this impossible position at Wenlock Road School in the London School Board division of Hackney. A School Board survey in 1894<sup>3</sup> found the following numbers in his school and the pupil : teacher ratios speak for themselves:

Teacher	Standard	No. on roll on Weds 7-3-94	No. in class on Weds 7-3-94. a.m.	No. in class on Weds 7-3-94. p.m.	Average on roll for year ending 22-3- 94	Average attendance for year ending 22-3-94
H. Sinclair	VII	5	4	4	10	2
	VI	16	16	15	12	8
	V	35	24	22	38	30
J. Freeman	IV	60	54	56	62	52
H. Lowerison	III	67	62	62	78	62
J.T. Jones	II	86	72	72	81	64
J. Ryder A.W. Radford *	I	131	103	103	103	79
TOTALS=		400	335	334	384	297

(\*)= Head Teacher

Standard 1 was divided into upper and lower. The head teacher taught the lower.

<sup>1</sup> Election handbill. I.L.P. 5.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Education Muddle and the way out-the manifesto of the Social Democratic Federation’, *Justice*, 11 Oct. 1902.

<sup>3</sup> The London Metropolitan Archive, SBL 1628, 1894.

F.J. Gould, who also taught in Hackney, faced a similar situation in Turin Street School where he taught from 1880-88. In 1880 he had 88 boys in his class (one of two classes at Standard II). The 1883 Inspector's report showed that he had 49 boys in his class (one of two at Standard IV) who demonstrated an average attendance rate of 85%. However, in 1884 he taught three standards (Five, Six and Seven) to a total of 134 boys. In 1886 he taught one of two classes at Standard II to 82 children.<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, who sensed both the lost opportunity this represented and what could all too easily move in to fill the vacuum, straddled the boundary of sympathy and censure when he wrote,

And masters (perhaps not unnaturally) finding that they have not the time which would be needed for personal dealing with each boy, nor the forces at their command by which they might hope to introduce new ideals of life and conduct into their little community, and feeling thus utterly powerless to cope with the situation, allow themselves to drift into a policy of mere silence with regard to it, tempered by outbreaks of ungoverned and unreasoning severity.<sup>2</sup>

"The twack of the cane resounded"<sup>3</sup>, as Gould later noted, in an education system within which he found himself "the most restless teacher in London."<sup>4</sup>

The third site of socialist opposition to education as it stood was the syllabus. Commentaries here could be divided into two groups. The first focused on the perceived detrimental effects of what was actually taught. History and Geography, for example, were presented in a such a way as to highlight the glories of the British Empire and its military traditions.<sup>5</sup> The Woolwich *Labour Notes* criticised the London School Board for allowing History to be reduced to a list of "the births, marriages and deaths of kings and queens" and proposed replacing it with the, "*history of the people*."<sup>6</sup> The importance of the control of these subjects was emphasised by Henry

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<sup>1</sup> The first, third and last figures here are from the Turin Street School Log Books. London Metropolitan Archive, Eo/Div5/TUR/LB/1. The second figure is from Government Report for Turin Street School, 18 Aug. 1883. London Metropolitan Archive, Eo/Ps/12/T33/16. This report shows that this standard was taught jointly by Gould and another teacher, T. Hill, there were 98 boys in the standard and thus the figure of 49 in Gould's class is an estimate. From 1888-1896 he taught in Northey Street School, Tower Hamlets. The surviving records do not list class sizes.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Affection in Education*, 491.

<sup>3</sup> F.J. Gould, 'A Teacher's Retrospect', *The Contemporary Review*, Dec. 1931, 766.

<sup>4</sup> F.J. Gould, *The Life Story of a Humanist*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, H.W. Hobart, 'Education I - Elementary', *Justice*, 30 June 1894.

<sup>6</sup> 'Evening Continuation Schools', *Woolwich Labour Notes*, Aug. 1899. Italics in original.

Lazarus in his futuristic utopian plan wherein the state was assigned a rigid control over the History syllabus with harsh punishments for any deviation from it.<sup>1</sup> In the late nineteenth century pedagogues were able to admit that history could be used in class to promote “contentment and thankfulness amongst the people”<sup>2</sup> bearing out, perhaps, this socialist preoccupation.

Apart from certain incidents of reprehensible enthusiasm for elements in this curriculum, such as when T.J. MacNamara was lambasted by *Justice* for advocating the singing of jingo songs in schools,<sup>3</sup> teachers attracted very little hostility for this aspect of their work since it was clearly outside their power. The exception here was religious education. This was, of course, strongly opposed by socialists, and the fact that so many of the country’s children were seen to be in the clutches of clericalism in the voluntary sector of late nineteenth century education heightened the concern about the effects of systematic religious indoctrination that was publicly-funded and designed to teach children, “to obey their pastors and masters.”<sup>4</sup>

The relationship of teachers to religion attracted both sympathy and hostility. The sympathy centred on their exploitation by Clergy in the voluntary sector. Criticism was directed at their adherence to irrational dogmas and for propagating these beliefs through the public elementary school system. Glasier criticised teachers for either choosing to hold such beliefs or, even worse, for pretending to hold them in order to keep a job, “surrounded as we are by the most ghastly theological superstition and hypocrisy, the majority of our teachers seem afraid to utter one word which might suggest that they were less superstitious than their neighbours.”<sup>5</sup> Peter Kropotkin addressed his *Appeal to The Young*, to those who had managed to escape the superstition that “your teachers have sought to force upon you.”<sup>6</sup> Socialists campaigned ceaselessly for secular education and believed that the conscience clauses that allowed parents to absent their children from religious lessons were not only ineffective but could actually

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Lazarus, *The English Revolution of the Twentieth Century*, 364.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in, ‘Drill, Discipline and the Elementary School Ethos’, in, P. McCann, ed., *Popular Education and Socialisation in the Nineteenth Century*, 183.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Educational and Municipal notes’, *Justice*, 7 July 1900. MacNamara was the editor of *The Teachers’ Aid*, when, in its edition of 11 Aug. 1900, it ran an article entitled ‘Patriotism at School’, which detailed the singing of jingo songs and the saluting of the flag etc.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Free Compulsory Education’, *The Socialist*, Nov. 1886.

<sup>5</sup> James Bruce Glasier, ‘Progress and Hypocrisy’, *The Labour Prophet*, Aug. 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *An Appeal to the Young*, 1.

be counter-productive since they could single out the children of progressively-minded parents for victimisation by Christian teachers.<sup>1</sup>

The comparative timidity of the majority of teachers on the issue of religion was made evident by the actions of those who had the moral strength to stand up for secular principles. Both Gould and Lowerison made such a stand. Lowerison's stand is recorded but not detailed in remaining records of the Hackney division of the London School Board. It is simply noted that he was involved in some kind of dispute over religious education in the school.<sup>2</sup> Gould was a columnist in the *Secular Review* who also rebelled against the dull theology of religious lessons. His case came to the attention of the Rev. Joseph R. Diggle who, as head of the London School Board, exempted Gould from the duty of having to give these classes. Though the matter was thus settled to Gould's satisfaction it was subsequently raised in Parliamentary Committee by the M.P. Allanson Picton. However, his victory was short-lived and the issue of his role in religious instruction came back to haunt him in 1896 when he was given the choice of either teaching religion or resigning. He made the latter choice.<sup>3</sup>

Hobart noted that the existing education system taught children that greed was good and that the natural order of the world was one of "dog-eat-dog" competitiveness. But he, and others who propounded the second group of socialist comments on the syllabus, also stressed the corollary of this. This was that the benefits to humanity of co-operation and socialism were not taught.<sup>4</sup> However, other emphases given in the widespread criticism of the existing educational order were centred not so much on the political slant given to much of what was taught, which implied that History, for example, could be taught in a useful, socialist way, but rather on the whole nature of what was seen as the function of education and the nature of knowledge. Socialists such as Carpenter sought a sweeping redefinition of both. In proposing a cure for the sickness known as civilisation Carpenter wrote that it was characteristic of the alienation and perversity of the diseased social body that what was seen as knowledge was, in fact, an abstraction from reality, morality and the physical world with no real existence outside the

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Quelch, 'Secular Education', *Justice*, 26 May 1894.

<sup>2</sup> The Hackney Division of the London School Board, Entries for Wenlock Road School, 27 July 1894. In London Metropolitan Archive, SBL 659-662.

<sup>3</sup> F.J. Gould, 'A Teacher's Retrospect', *The Contemporary Review*, Dec. 1931, 766-767. *Hansard*, 9 Nov. 1888, 766-812, especially 810.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, H.W. Hobart, 'Education 1 - Elementary', *Justice*, 30 June 1894.

world of books. This left people to study only “the ghosts of things” and this accelerated their divorce from not only the physical world but from their fellows and indeed themselves.<sup>1</sup> Bax also argued that this artificial division of knowledge into small compartments, each jealously guarded by its own ‘experts’, was a hallmark of bourgeois society. This specialisation had a disempowering effect on students. When they developed their own educational initiatives socialists were always keen to reunite these artificially fractured elements of knowledge as part of their attempt to create whole individuals free from the perverse alienation of modern ‘civilisation’.

While socialists were not necessarily being critical of the teachers for implementing the curriculum allotted to them, this view of knowledge and the proposed style of education it engendered set out a whole new paradigm of both curriculum and methodology which could be used as a yardstick by which to draw unfavourable comparisons with the present state of classroom practice. By having in their minds a clear impression of what a teacher could achieve socialists were better able to proceed to make statements about what teachers should, but did not, achieve.

Lowerison used this as the basis for a highly constructive approach to his fellow teachers. As well as agitating to reform the whole system he also worked to improve the education of his pupils and to open the eyes of his colleagues. It was to these ends that he helped to set up and became Secretary of the London Schools’ Swimming Association and tried to form a London Schools’ Rambling Club. Lowerison was very keen on physical exercise for children and, like many others in the movement, a particularly strong advocate of swimming.<sup>2</sup> Swimming was not only good, possibly the best exercise, it provided him with just about his only chance to get to be with his pupils in a natural setting. There was a Fabian Swimming Challenge Shield as a trophy for the L.S.S.A. and he wrote a brief report on the final of this contest for *Fabian News*.<sup>3</sup> He saw the London Schools’ Rambling Club as having the dual advantages of increasing children’s understanding, but also, “among teachers it could act as a medium of exchange of botanical and natural history specimens, fossils etc. and

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation - its cause and cure*, 34 & 69.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, ‘Our representatives - J. Horsfall’, *The Social Democrat*, June 1899.

<sup>3</sup> See, ‘The Fabian Swimming Challenge Shield,’ *Fabian News*, Jan. 1894. The Association has forgotten Lowerison whose name does not appear on their list of founder members, interestingly enough, given the incident at Victoria Park (see below) Headlam’s name is listed by the L.S.S.A. as a founder. Lowerison’s daughter has recently presented the Association with a memorial cup for her Father.

facilitate what is more important-the exchange of ideas with regard to Nature education and methods and appliances.”<sup>1</sup> Margaret MacMillan agreed that a knowledge of Natural History was “priceless” to an elementary school teacher and added that she would rather teachers had less training in arithmetic and grammar in order to allow time for the formal study of nature.<sup>2</sup>

The fourth area of the education system that came in for socialist criticism concerned the terms and conditions on which teachers were employed. These reflected the prevailing liberal approach to education that stressed the need for economy and minimal state involvement. Even when education was delivered by a publicly elected body, a school board, this ethos could dominate the proceedings. Under the tutelage of the vilified Rev. Diggle, teachers of the London School Board were obliged to administer the initial stages of proceedings that led to parents who did not pay the ‘school pence’ being prosecuted by the board.<sup>3</sup> Harry Quelch, in the editor’s chair at *Justice*, was as quick to point out that this meant extra work for teachers as he was to show how the Diggleites proposed to cover the cost of a pay rise for the Board’s bureaucrats by cutting the pay of teachers.<sup>4</sup> *The South Eastern Progressive* sought the opinion of Acland on the legality of teachers being instructed to take up collections in school time and published his answer that such procedures were “highly improper”.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, such myopic practices continued to squeeze the life out of the teachers who in their turn wrung the spirit out of their pupils. As socialists saw the situation, these practices were inevitable for as long as education was the servant of the individualist system.

Teachers, like many workers in late-Victorian Britain, had little or no job security and what they had was dependent upon their success in getting their pupils to jump through the examiner’s hoops. However, in the voluntary schools sector this insecurity could be even worse as teachers were often appointed on contracts that loaded them up with intolerable extra duties. They could be required to act as church organists, parish clerk, Sunday school teacher and even bell-ringer, all without any extra pay.

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, *Fields and Folklore*, 49.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *The Ethical End in Education*. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A2/2.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Quelch, ‘School Board Officialism’, *Justice*, 23 March 1887.

<sup>4</sup> ‘School Board Economy’, *Justice*, 16 July 1887.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Collections in Board Schools’, *The South Eastern Progressive*, 1 July 1893.



These extraneous functions placed further strain on teachers and so exacerbated an already intolerable situation in the classroom.<sup>1</sup>

Not only was religion taught and not only did the Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists control in the most narrowly partisan manner many of the country's schools but they also ran the teacher training colleges and so had a crucial hand in the production of the elite of the teaching body. This ensured that many teachers would be of precisely the social or political persuasion that was most likely to antagonise socialists.

## **Socialism and Trade Unions**

Within the framework of these broad sketches of socialist opposition to the system and what went on in classrooms it was possible to build considerable sympathy for teachers who were occasionally viewed as being every bit as trapped in the workings of the system as any other worker, and sympathetic statements of this nature were occasionally made. Since they were often victimised by clergy, a lack of any sympathy at all for teachers would have been remarkable. *The Labour Prophet* once went so far as to call for a public vote of thanks for teachers assigning to them responsibility for delivering whatever benefits the people derived from the public education system.<sup>2</sup> Hobart, though a vehement critic of the system, drew the line at criticising the teachers to whom he would attach no blame at all.<sup>3</sup>

These gestures of support were, however, far outnumbered by what were often vitriolic attacks. The root cause of these was once again the notion of duty. Parents had a duty to tend to the best interests of their children. Their failure to do so could be partly excused by their ignorance. Teachers, by definition, had no such excuse. If parents beat their children it was seen as ultimately being the fault of the individualist system which ascribed to parents property rights over 'their' children. Parents may have had this as a legal right and also had the right to delegate this power to others, teachers for example.<sup>4</sup> Teachers did not have to embrace this authority.

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<sup>1</sup> For a full disclosure of these extra duties and the union's attitude to them see, 'The Teacher out of School'. Special supplement to, *The Schoolmaster*, 21 March 1896. Also L. Staines's article on 'Legal Difficulties', in his series, 'Difficulties of Teachers and how to overcome them'. *The Teachers' Aid*, 7 May 1887.

<sup>2</sup> S.G. Hobson, 'Labour and Education', *The Labour Prophet*, July 1894.

<sup>3</sup> H.W. Hobart, 'Education (part two) Elementary', *Justice*, 7 July 1894.

<sup>4</sup> 'Corporal Punishment', *Justice*, 11 June 1892.

The least that socialists felt that they and society as a whole had a right to expect of teachers as educated and rational men and women was that they should fight to ameliorate the worst excesses of the educational system. When teachers were actually to be found doing precisely the opposite, actively campaigning through their unions to keep the worst aspects (here the emphasis was, overwhelmingly, on corporal punishment) of the system intact, then these differences could quickly become well-demarcated battle lines. As Hyndman put it, “I cannot but feel contempt for those who possess the means of emancipating themselves and fail to use it.”<sup>1</sup> Since such actions as teachers took were organised through their unions it will be useful to sketch out the broad parameters of socialist thought on trades unions in general before proceeding to examine the practices and culture of teacher trade unionism in particular, as this provides the backdrop to the socialist attitude to teachers as workers.

Some socialists stressed the educational role of unions, seeing in them the kernel of the crucial moral lessons of solidarity and co-operation as opposed to the dominant values of competition and self-interested individualism which could set the workers on the right road. W. S. de Mattos in a series of articles on *The New Unionism*, phrased it thus, “In hundreds, and even thousands of cases, men previously improvident, drunken and totally selfish, are now, through their Union having lifted them out of the evil rut of hopeless poverty, steady, temperate and ready to act so as to promote the collective welfare of their fellow workers.”<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that these comments refer to a new union. Socialists had far more time for these unions than the older craft-based groupings which were seen as elitist and encapsulating all the weaknesses of unionism in general. Tom Mann accepted that these craft-based unions had done good work in the past but asked his readers, “what good purpose are they serving now?”<sup>3</sup> The N.U.E.T./N.U.T. fitted the model of the older type of union far better than that of the new.<sup>4</sup>

A widely envisaged view of the structure of the coming socialist commonwealth was one in which the workers would organise production and hence society through their unions. In his *What Socialists Want*, Morris

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<sup>1</sup> H. M. Hyndman, ‘Trades Unions and Social Progress’, *Justice*, 8 Sept. 1900.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. de Mattos, ‘The New Unionism’, *The People’s Press*, 29 March 1890.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Mann, ‘The 8 hour Day’, in, John Laurent, ed., *Tom Mann Social & Economic Writings*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> For a further discussion of this point see: Martin Lawn, *Servants of The State : The Contested Control of Teaching 1900-1930*, 13.

wrote that, “the trades will have councils which will organise each the labour which they understand and these again, will meet when necessary to discuss matters common to all the trades.”<sup>1</sup> *Justice* once even recognised just such a role being assigned to the N.U.T..<sup>2</sup> Ben Tillet, envisaging a more statist version of the socialist future, wrote that even under socialism workers would need unions, for though he might not be so poor under socialism, without unions the worker could lose all his freedom to the state. He used, as his example, teachers who worked for school boards which were publicly controlled bodies which nonetheless still put pressure on their workers.<sup>3</sup> Credence for this view came from three sources. Letters to Graham Wallas, the Fabian member of the London School Board, showed that teachers, the “working units”<sup>4</sup> of education, were viewed as shirkers who sought to circumvent the examination system in order to be able to get away with doing “less work than ever”.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, it could be found in Wallas’s voting against a motion to extend a pay rise to female, as well as male, teachers<sup>6</sup> and, thirdly, in the School Board’s hostility to paying trade union rates for contracted work on its premises. In 1888, for example, a delegation from the London Trades Council was received by the London School Board. The delegates asked the board to grant its annual printing contract to firms that paid union rates. A vote to do so was taken, which Annie Besant’s *Link* reported, was lost by thirty five votes to eight. Socialists supported such campaigns. H. H. Champion wrote that painting firms were offering workers at the Princeton Street Board School seven pence ha’penny, one penny per hour less than the union rate.<sup>7</sup> Edward Underhill, a member of the Fabian Society, campaigning for election to the board in Lancaster, let his potential voters know of his opposition to such practices. “In contracts for labour he, as a trades unionist, will by voice and vote urge the payment of the highest possible wage to the contractor’s employees, and thus endeavour to raise the standard of living amongst the workers of the town.”<sup>8</sup> Once on the Walthamstow School Board Harry Bird

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, *What Socialists Want*, 231. See also, E.B. Bax, *Address to Trades Unions*, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Muse, ‘Socialism and Education’, *Justice*, 27 June 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Tillet, *Trades Unionism and Socialism*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> ‘To Teachers in Elementary Schools’, *Justice*, 23 Aug. 1884.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Graham Wallas from J. S. G. Burnell, 25 Sept. 1895. The Wallas Papers 1/16.

<sup>6</sup> ‘School Board Notes’, *The Bow and Bromley Socialist*, Feb. 1898.

<sup>7</sup> ‘London School Board’, *The Labour Elector*, 27 July 1889.

<sup>8</sup> Lancaster Fabian Society school board election handbill (n.d. ?1893/4?). Coll. Misc. 375. See also, *The People’s Press*, 15 March 1890, for reports of similar campaigning by Stewart Headlam and Annie Besant.

campaigned to have a member of the Gasworkers' Union elected to the Board.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of links between unions and socialists were thus often stressed and many ordinary socialists were, despite the hostility of some of their national leaders, active union members. When they were involved in union affairs socialists would often be prominent. They could, moreover use their national contacts to circumvent trade union bureaucratic lethargy to obtain victory in a dispute. One case in point was that of Leonnard Hall, who as well as being an active socialist, was General Secretary of The Lancashire and Adjacent Counties Labour League. In the summer of 1892 labourers at the Hyde-based iron works of G.B. Goodfellow were on strike for a reasonable minimum wage. Goodfellow had a large contract with the London County Council. Hall sought to strike at this source of the company's revenue by asking John Burns, a labour representative on the London County Council, to get the contract suspended pending a settlement of the strike.<sup>2</sup>

Like Hall, the socialist movement as a whole campaigned vigorously in support of basic union demands with nationally-known socialist speakers and writers being inundated with requests to speak at rallies in support of strikers or at labour rallies.<sup>3</sup> However, it was one thing to ascribe unions a political role in the socialist commonwealth and often quite a different thing to get them to assume such a political function in the here and now. Indeed it could even be difficult for socialists to get support for the actions of new unions of the unskilled from the traditional craft-based unions.<sup>4</sup> Despite the occasional victory of socialist and union alliances, as in the case of Bridges-Adams at Greenwich in 1897,<sup>5</sup> this division could manifest itself at school board elections. Conducting a post-mortem on a resounding defeat in the Liverpool School Board election of 1894 *The Labour Chronicle* of the local Fabian Society assumed that "the late election, will I trust, have dispelled the delusion which many harboured, that because a man is a Trades

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Election and After', *The Socialist Critic*, 24 March 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Hall To Burns, 20 July 1892. British Library Add Manu 46290 f206.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, letter from Tom Mann to John Burns 15 April 1891. British Library Add Manu 46286 f73.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Letter from J.L. Mahon to John Burns, 11 July 1890. British Library Add Manu 46289 f121-130.

<sup>5</sup> 'Between Ourselves', *The Labour Leader*, 4 Dec. 1897. But even here it must be noted that the Joint Committee of Socialists and Trades Unionists broke up in pre-election disarray over the definition of the term 'Free Maintenance'. Bridges-Adams, being backed subsequently by the Woolwich Trades Council but apparently not by the local socialist bodies.

Unionist he will of necessity vote for our candidates.”<sup>1</sup> Hobart, of the North London S.D.F., was disabused of any similar fantasies which he may have held when in the school board election he contested “many hundreds of compositors” did not vote for him despite his being on their own union’s executive.<sup>2</sup>

There was thus an important caveat to socialist support for unions in that they were not seen as the ideal vehicle for making the inherently political journey from capitalism to socialism. As Ben Tillet wrote, “I want to see the movement more than a mere orthodox trades union movement.”<sup>3</sup> In his comparison of the two Allen Clarke wrote,

though trades unionism has been a fairly good shield, it is but a narrow one; and further, though the workers have often used it for purposes aggressive as well as defensive, it has never been anything but a shield, never a sword. And a shield, however strong it may be, is still a crude weapon to use in a fight. Indeed, we should smile if we read in any romance of a knight going to war with nothing but a shield as equipment. Mad old Don Quixote had more sense than that.<sup>4</sup>

Using similar imagery others compared trades unions to a knight in shining armour, but one who was up against a gun: “very imposing, no doubt, but in the struggle with capitalism, useless.”<sup>5</sup>

Unions, by their very nature, operated within the system that socialists sought to topple. Their actions were necessary to lift workers out of the trough of poverty and to initiate some kind of dialogue with ideas of resistance and power. However, their strategic effectiveness was at best, limited, whilst at their worst, unions could become simply the vehicles by which one group of workers bettered themselves at the expense of another. Such heightened and organised competitiveness was bad enough when it was between groups of adults, but was contemptible when adults used their unions to prolong the exploitation of children by way of the half-time system or, when, as in the case of teachers, union strength was used to support the infliction of corporal punishment on children. A further limitation on the effectiveness of unionism was that it could become the

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Reeves, ‘The Lesson of the Elections’, *The Labour Chronicle*, Dec. 1894.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The School Board Contest in North London’, *Justice*, 1 Dec. 1894.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Tillet letter to John Burns, 5 Nov. 1896. British Library Add Manus 46285 f179.

<sup>4</sup> Allen Clarke, *The Effects of the Factory System*, 143.

<sup>5</sup> J. Keir Hardie, ‘How it is being done’, *Woolwich Labour Notes*, Feb. 1899.

means by which a narrow section of the class, “the rest and be thankful trades union officials” strove for personal middle-class respectability and in the process united to “warn the workingman against socialism.”<sup>1</sup> This difference of emphasis between the strategic and the tactical positioning of, respectively, socialists and unions could become a gulf across which the only communication that was possible was the hurling of abuse. “Our unions”, an editorial in *Justice* once declared are “timid, conservative, lethargic insurance associations”, their leadership, nothing less than the “decoy ducks of capitalism.”<sup>2</sup> Limitations such as these, expressed in language as strong as this, were the defining characteristics of much of the dialogue between socialists and teacher trade unionists in this period and it is to this fraught relationship that attention must now be turned examining firstly the general relationship between socialism and the middle class.

## **Socialists and Teacher Trade Unionism**

Apart from the pressure of the education system itself which, as we have seen, bore down heavily upon teachers, and the lure of career advancement that was held out for those who were successful, there was also the goal of the attainment of middle-class respectability. Simeon Twigg of *The Clarion* leapt upon this. He had no doubt at all that teachers had a great number of grievances that were wholly justifiable (the exception was their demand to use corporal punishment) and which merited the most urgent consideration,

but who is to induce the Government to give these conditions of service their ‘thorough reconsideration’? Not the teachers. These ladies and gentlemen can write anonymous letters to the Press. They can even dare to approach the School Boards -in ‘private meetings’. But that is as far as they can get in the way of agitation. They dislike trades unionism; it is not respectable. Trades unionism would help them-but it is not respectable; and your assistant teacher, like your shop assistant, is nothing if not respectable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Hall, Land, *Labour and Liberty or the ABC of Reform*, 5. See also, Thomas Binnings, *Organised Labour: The duty of the trades’ unions in relation to socialism*, 94. And, Alex M. Thompson, ‘Why it can’t be done’, *Woolwich and District Labour Notes*, Dec. 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Quelch, ‘Social Democracy and Trade Unionism’, *Justice*, 22 May 1897.

<sup>3</sup> Simeon Twigg, ‘Assistant Teachers, their grievances and their moral turpitude’, *The Clarion*, 28 Jan. 1893.

Respectability was thus synonymous with a “despicable cowardice”<sup>1</sup> which meant that teachers did not even have the will to resist the system that squeezed them, let alone the courage of their convictions necessary to attack it, “as a body they are deplorably lacking in backbone.”<sup>2</sup> Teachers were, through their use of corporal punishment, manifestly failing to fulfil a social duty, a contemptible position which was made pitiful by their failure to exercise even their duty to themselves as workers which they sacrificed in the most craven of ways on the alter of middle-class respectability.

Though teachers sought to portray themselves as the victims of the system they did not attack the system as a whole and it was this timidity and willingness to compromise rather than to take a principled stand that often angered socialists. Twigg led the field here as he launched repeated salvos of tirades against “whining pedagogues” and their “moral turpitude”<sup>3</sup> of the type that lead to Glasier’s attacks on their gutless hypocrisy in relation to religion. Indeed much of the scorn poured on teachers by socialists was directed at their unwillingness to take any kind of a stand on anything at all, save corporal punishment, or even to defend themselves in the most basic of trade-unionist manners. Hardie may have felt that, in 1896, one third of teachers were socialists<sup>4</sup> but many of his comrades disagreed. Kropotkin implied that teaching was no job for any self-respecting socialist at all.<sup>5</sup> Morris was sure that education was “in the hands of the privileged class”<sup>6</sup> and when she urged socialists to become teachers H. Jennie Elcum did not seem to think that they were over represented in the ranks of the profession.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, at the start of this period, the S.D.F. felt it necessary to issue, in *Justice*, a stirring rallying cry calling teachers to the socialist camp.<sup>8</sup>

Their sustained critique of teachers was based in part on an assessment of the perceived social aspirations and political attitudes of teachers. It is worth spending some time on the socialist analysis of the role of class in the advance towards socialism, and the place of teachers within this broader

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Simeon Twigg, ‘Whining Pedagogues’, *The Clarion*, 22 July 1893.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> J. K. Hardie, *Young Men In A Hurry*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *An Appeal to the Young*, 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> William Morris, *Dawn of a New Epoch - a Lecture*, 18. The Pickles Papers, Pic/110 n.d..

<sup>7</sup> H. Jennie Elcum, ‘Schools and Education’, *The Clarion*, 10 Oct. 1896.

<sup>8</sup> ‘To Teachers in Elementary Schools’, *Justice*, 23 Aug. 1884.

picture, since it will help to shed some light on the conclusions of recent revisionist historians that late nineteenth century socialism lacked an understanding of class.

The moral force of the socialist critique of existing society was marshalled through the language of the religion of humanity and this category, 'humanity', and its vehicle, the fellowship, were both presented to society in forms that were not explicitly class-based. Patrick Joyce has argued that this spoke more of concord than of conflict between the classes of society, and in fact he has portrayed it as one of the linguistic orderings and shapings of reality that ultimately deny the validity of a class reading of the socialism of the period.<sup>1</sup> However, the detailed study of one example of relations between socialists and one section of the middle class, namely teachers, must call this conclusion into question.

It is certainly true that socialists had no doubt that the quality of life for everyone would be better under socialism, whether under the prevailing conditions they were rich or poor, exploiter or exploitee. The logical outcome of the identity of ends and means, the fellowship, was that John Trevor welcomed into the Labour Church all people, whatever their social background, who were prepared to stand up against the competitive system. Carpenter similarly described those involved in the capitalist system as his "brothers and sisters".<sup>2</sup> However, it was one thing to open one's arms to receive these people and quite another to find them in one's embrace. Even when the new religion won converts from the middle class, these new members came as individuals who moved outside their class which still remained behind them intact and in power. Middle-class individuals might join the socialists but between the classes as such there was no room for compromise. "Surely the man who believes that co-operation can exist between two classes whose interests are antagonistic must be in possession of a very limited intellectual power."<sup>3</sup>

Histories of socialism have often concentrated on the leaders of the movement, many of whom were middle-class converts (quite spectacularly so in some cases, such as H.M. Hyndman who was never seen without his frock coat and silk top hat). However, this does not mean that the whole

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<sup>1</sup> See, Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Letter entitled, 'Unionism and Socialism', *The Worker's Cry*, 15 Aug. 1891, 13.



movement was one of the middle classes. For example one of F.J. Gould's political homes was the Leicester Secular Society which had a cross-class appeal but, nonetheless, the majority of its members were artisans and workers and this despite its being an expensive organisation to join.<sup>1</sup> The object of socialism was the realisation of the religion of humanity with its promise of the fulfilment of each and every person's latent and suppressed individuality through fellowship regardless of their current location in the class system. However, it was clear which of the classes was most heavily implicated as an accomplice to the system and therefore it was also abundantly clear which class was most likely to stand up and fight for the fellowship. The goal of humanity would be achieved by the workers whose cause in militancy was that of a class but whose triumph would be that of humanity. Bax phrased it thus, "the political class feeling of the socialist workman ... is class feeling with a difference. It is a class feeling that has already negated itself: otherwise expressed it is human feeling in a class guise. The socialist workman's conscious end and aspiration is the annihilation of classes."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the triumphal realisation of humanity could only be achieved by the workers acting as a class. This class action could attempt to educate those in the middle class, or the working class, who failed to see the rationality of the fellowship, or it could equally take the form of hostility to those who pursued a reprehensible course inimical to the platform of brotherhood whether they were capitalist sweaters, flogging teachers, or working-class exploiters of child labour. Socialism thus offered the hand of fraternity to those who were prepared to accept it but made this same hand into a fist where the circumstances demanded it. This is made plain in the last third of William Morris's 'The March of the Workers', one of his *Chants for Socialists*: (it is best read, as it was intended to be, to the air of 'John Brown's Body'.)

Is it war, then? Will ye Perish as the dry wood in the fire?  
Is it peace? Then be ye of us, let your hope be our desire.  
Come and live! for life awaketh, and the world shall never  
tire;  
And the hope is marching on.

On we march then, we the workers, and the rumour that ye  
hear

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<sup>1</sup> David S. Nash, 'F.J. Gould and the Leicester Secular Society: a Positivist Commonwealth in Edwardian Politics', *Midland History*, vol. XVI 1991, 127.

<sup>2</sup> E.B. Bax, 'Man Vs the Classes', in, Bax, *The Ethics of Socialism*, 104.

Is the blended sound of battle and delive'rance drawing  
near;  
For the hope of every creature is the banner that we bear,  
And the world is marching on.

Hark the rolling of the thunder!  
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder  
riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,  
And the host comes marching on.<sup>1</sup>

The 'sound of battle' may appear to be most unbrotherly. However, it was morally justified within the discourse of the socialist brotherhood as the means of achieving the 'delive'rance' of the helpless. This was particularly true when the section of the middle class under scrutiny was the teaching profession and their helpless victims were over-worked, badly-clothed, and half-starved working-class children. If socialism sought to include people from the middle class, such as teachers, it did so in the full knowledge that they were the group who deserved the most pity because they were the group most morally poisoned by the system. Precisely because of this they were the least likely to aid themselves. Thus the pity they deserved was often translated by socialists like Twigg into expressions of total contempt. Teachers, like all sections of humanity entrapped in the snares of the system, deserved the fulfilment that 'deliv'rance' would bring and to give them this liberty the socialist fellowship was prepared to organise independently to fight them and the system which they defended.

In their annotations to *The Manifesto of The Socialist League* Bax and Morris described teachers as "belonging to the intellectual proletariat" and as "slaves to capital in their way just as the mechanics are in theirs."<sup>2</sup> In strictly objective terms this may have been correct but it left out of social class identity any consideration of the political construction of such an identity and so ignored the forces seeking to counter balance socialist appeals to teachers. Enid Stacey tried to appeal to teachers' notions of child welfare and professional pride and to ally these to an appeal to join her in the socialist ranks.

'I have the true educational ideal' cries the teacher. 'I desire to see the latent faculties of my boys and girls brought out and developed to the fullest extent. [But] ... The conditions of present existence will not let me educate.

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, 'The March of the Workers', in, Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium*, 352.

<sup>2</sup> *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, 9.

Where will I find hope?' And the only answer is 'Socialism will provide educational facilities as yet unknown to the most ardent teacher.'<sup>1</sup>

She could have been describing Harry Lowerison.

However, Lowerison did not have such an optimistic view of his colleagues. In 1893 he made this plain when, writing of teachers, he noted that, "I have never mixed with a more narrow, contemptible, bourgeois set of men".<sup>2</sup> These were the type of men who put the narrow ends of career advancement before the broader and better, social aims of true education. Lowerison recounted an anecdote that, for him, epitomised this characteristic. He once dived into the lake at Victoria Park to rescue a boy who appeared to be drowning during a swimming contest. The boy, it transpired, was playing about and as Lowerison stood dripping and cursing on the podium,

comes up to me one of that highly respectable body, the Board School teachers of London. 'It's all right old man; you won't lose by it. Stewart Headlam is here.' ... This man is not a socialist; but I need hardly say that he is a successful teacher, who has carried the art of gauging appearances to its farthest limit.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, teachers did not even couple their pupils' best interests to their own career ambitions. In Lowerison's book of short tales for children, *From Paleolith to Motor Car*, the last story, 'Wattie's Christmas' is a very thinly disguised autobiography. In this story a young boy, who was clearly very ill from malnutrition, was sent out into the playground by the head teacher because the rules dictated that the playground was the place for pupils to be at break time despite the fact that it was raining. He subsequently caught pneumonia and died.<sup>4</sup> This head teacher was the type of man whom socialists saw as being a typical N.U.E.T./N.U.T. member.

Teachers were, as has been noted above, subjected to a harsh working environment within which their continued employment was contingent upon their getting large classes of underfed (and all too often overworked) children through exams. Like any group of employees they sought to

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<sup>1</sup> Enid Stacey, 'The Tide of Socialism', *The Bolton and District Independent Labour Pioneer*, April 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, 'Something to be thankful for', *Justice*, 17 June 1893.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* Headlam was a member of the London School Board.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, 'Wattie's Christmas', *From Paleolith to Motor Car*. For another example of socialist hostility to the petty-minded and ignorant tyranny of head teachers in schools see, 'Under the London Board', *The Social Democrat*, 1900.

control their own workplace and the processes therein. In order to do this they had to control the children. These trade-unionist demands for control lay at the base of both teachers' opposition to the half-time system and their advocacy of corporal punishment. These two positions will now be examined in turn.

Allen Clarke in his survey of the factory system noted that no teacher liked having half-timers in the class as they impeded the progress of the whole body of the class towards success in the exam. Since all pupils were subject to the same examinations the half-timers were crammed more rigorously and given more homework in order to cover the same ground as their full-time friends.<sup>1</sup> A motion passed by the 1890 conference of the N.U.T. read, "that in the opinion of this Conference, the half-time difficulty should be especially recognised in the instructions to H.M.'s Inspectors, and specific instructions should be laid down which will ensure leniency in the examination of the children".<sup>2</sup> The use of the word 'difficulty' here illuminates the general attitude. It was repeated in a union circular of August in the same year which announced that, "for the first time the special difficulties of half-time schools are recognised and the Inspector is instructed 'in recommending the various grants' to accept 'a somewhat lower standard of quality than in the case of other schools'".<sup>3</sup> This self-interest was reflected in the pages of *The Schoolmaster's* special report on the system which used a large type face and a liberal sprinkling of capital letters to draw the attention of its readers to the fact that the presence of half-timers, "Restricts the Curriculum of the Whole School."<sup>4</sup> There were teachers, and even some teachers' union leaders, who opposed the system as a matter of morality, but in the main, the difference here is between a socialist principled opposition to the system as a whole and the union's willingness to accept a compromise that would ease the 'difficulty' and thus allow their members to stay employed.

However, the most glaring disparity between the mind set of socialists and teacher trade unionists was that over the use of corporal punishment. Earl Barnes, the American child-study theorist, noted that in England "one is brought face to face with the national dependence on physical pain and

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Clarke, *The Effects of the Factory System*, 104.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution no. 21 of the 1890 N.U.T. Conference.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in E. & R. Frow, *A Survey of the Half-Time System in Education*, 69.

<sup>4</sup> *The Schoolmaster*, Half timer special supplement, 9 Feb. 1896. Capitals in original.

discomfort as a means of correcting evil ways.”<sup>1</sup> It was observed that whenever children played at being a teacher the immediate response was always for the child assigned the key role to beat another child.<sup>2</sup> But though its use was undoubtedly widespread, acceptance of corporal punishment was not. There were many cases of parents who criticised or attacked teachers who had beaten their children. William James, for example, wrote to *The Clarion* to let people know that he had, “very strong opinions upon the subject”, and that he would deal “summarily” with anyone who attempted to use violence to manage his children at school.<sup>3</sup> Henry Salt, the leading light of the Humanitarian League, concluded that the working class as a whole, “rightly regarded such punishments as forcibly imposed on them and their children by laws in the making of which they had no share.”<sup>4</sup> Anna Davin has documented many cases of parents who stood between their children and a violent teacher and has equally concluded that this was a class issue.<sup>5</sup> This class bias built into the practice of corporal punishment in schools was obvious to socialists. In *The Clarion* H. Jennie Elcum wrote that when it came to beating, teachers showed, “greater consideration to the better-dressed children.”<sup>6</sup>

Socialists were lined up alongside the working class in opposition to the use of corporal punishment. On this crucial issue one could never define socialists as a sect making some sympathetic noises from the sidelines. As Lawn has noted, school strikes against the cane were often led by the children of local socialists,<sup>7</sup> and these strikes could get the full support of the wider socialist press. Socialists also joined the Society for the Reformation of School Discipline and worked with others to end the use of corporal punishment. This participation again, renders the ‘sect’ typology inappropriate. Socialists were actively involved in issues that mattered to sections of the working class and, moreover, their actions were predicated upon an analysis that concurred with that of the parents whose children were beaten. This came down to the stark fact that they were beaten because they were poor.

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<sup>1</sup> Earl Barnes, *Corporal Punishment as a means of Social Control*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Honnor Morten, *Inhumanity in Schools*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from William James, ‘The Treatment of Children at School’, *The Clarion*, 21 Jan. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Salt, *The Flogging Craze*, 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 131.

<sup>6</sup> H. Jennie Elcum, ‘Schools and Education’, *The Clarion*, 10 Oct. 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Lawn, *Servants of the State : The contested control of teaching 1900-1930*, 13.

Martin Lawn has done a great deal of work on teachers and politics, the principal focus of which lies outside the period under consideration here. However, he does make one comment that could pertain to the last two decades of the nineteenth century. When he wrote about corporal punishment he concluded that it divided teachers and socialists between 1900 and 1930 and alluded to a time when teachers and socialists had been allies.<sup>1</sup> If this era of alliance is to be taken as the preceding two decades (and it is difficult to see what other time he could be referring to) then it must be the conclusion of this chapter that Lawn is mistaken. Moreover, if he refers to an alliance between socialists and teachers on the subject of corporal punishment then nothing could be further from the truth. Corporal punishment was a central and divisive issue in the relations between teachers and socialists.

Corporal punishment was not permitted in socialist Sunday schools and virtually every socialist who wrote on the education system came out against state-provided child beating. The exception to this rule was Montague Blatchford. Robert Blatchford praised a workhouse school that he visited for not using corporal punishment<sup>2</sup> but his brother seemed to take more relaxed stance. He once related the story of how, on hot summer's afternoons, he and his school friends would deliberately set out to provoke their schoolmaster into outbursts of what would nowadays be described as random uncontrolled brutality. Blatchford delivered this to his readers as though he was portraying any joyous game of his boyhood before concluding "I rather fancy that the boys enjoyed this onslaught almost as much as he did."<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny either Montague Blatchford's account of this event, or, more generally that such baiting did occur. However, this glib attitude was an isolated example within socialist thinking of this period, which saw children as the victims of the system in general and teachers in particular.

Socialists did all they could to combat this practice. This included working together with other like-minded individuals in the Society for the Reform of School Discipline which was warmly praised in the 1902 *Labour Annual*.<sup>4</sup> The society was set up in the summer of 1901. Its General Committee had

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, 13. The passage mentioned is, "this conflict could place teachers on opposite sides to their erstwhile allies in the I.L.P. or S.D.F."

<sup>2</sup> Nunquam, 'A Workhouse School', *The Clarion*, 10 Aug. 1892.

<sup>3</sup> Montague Blatchford, 'The Education of Today and Tomorrow', *The Clarion*, 23 Nov. 1901.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Society for the reform of School Discipline', *The Labour Annual* 1902, 73.

sixty three members of whom, *I.L.P. News* reported, eleven were I.L.P. school board representatives.<sup>1</sup>

A good measure of the teachers' attitudes on the question of corporal punishment can be obtained from a survey of the language they used to describe the abolitionists. In a paper to the annual conference of the N.U.E.T. in 1883 Mr A. J. Clarkson of St Paul's School, Stratford, Essex set the tone. Opponents of corporal punishment were, he asserted, either misinformed and ignorant about both the extent of its use and the realities of teaching, or they were utopian dreamers, tender-hearted, unrealistic sentimentalists. In either case Clarkson insisted that teachers, who were in loco parentis, must be given the same right to beat children as society gave to parents.<sup>2</sup> Correspondence from the union in 1884 sought to draw the attention of the Secretary of the Education Department to the shortcomings of "the sentimental objections raised ... to the legitimate use of corporal punishment in schools."<sup>3</sup> Though he poured scorn on his 'utopian' opponents A. J. Clarkson told the conference that he would consider trying their educational schemes but "not at the expense of the elementary school teacher."<sup>4</sup> Teachers inhabited the real world not a utopia and this world gave them more than enough problems to confront every day without adding to the load by removing or restricting the use of corporal punishment.

In this real world the teachers were subjected to enormous pressure. Young Frankie Owen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* noticed that his teacher, "looks a bit worried sometimes, and sometimes he gets into a fine old wax when the boys don't pay attention."<sup>5</sup> The source of this anxiety was the need to get "the dullards ... up to the mark"<sup>6</sup> in the full knowledge that, on examination day, these same 'dullards' could easily bring ruination down upon their teacher. Not only did they have this disastrous fate hanging over their heads, but teachers' legitimate attempts to avoid it were

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<sup>1</sup> 'Society for the reform of School Discipline', *I.L.P. News*, July 1901.

<sup>2</sup> 'Corporal Punishment in Schools: Paper read to the annual conference of the N.U.E.T. in 1883, by, Mr A. J. Clarkson of St Paul's School, Stratford, Essex'. *N.U.E.T. Annual Report 1883*, cxx. This paper was also reported in *The Bradford Observer*, 28 March 1893, cutting in Coll Misc 54.

<sup>3</sup> *N.U.E.T. Annual Report 1884*, cxx.

<sup>4</sup> 'Corporal punishment in schools: Paper read to the annual conference of the N.U.E.T. in 1883, by, Mr A. J. Clarkson of St Paul's School, Stratford, Essex'. *N.U.E.T. Annual Report 1883*, cxx.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 80.

<sup>6</sup> 'Manchester Teachers' Association Ninth Report', Jan. 1884. Quoted in, A.B. Robertson, *Children, Teachers and Society. The over-pressure controversy 1880-1886*, 321.

made all the harder by, as they saw it, the massed ranks of the sentimentalists on the school boards and inspectorate who sought to limit their use of corporal punishment. As an assistant teacher Harry Lowerison was not legally empowered to beat the children in his class but,

as a colleague put it to me, while discussing the question of corporal punishment; 'it is this way Harry; if you do cane the Board *may* find you out and sack you; but if you do not cane, the Board *will* find you out after the examination and *will* sack you.'<sup>1</sup>

Teachers sought to portray themselves as the victims of this system. In one of his short stories grouped together under the title of *School Board Idylls* J. Runciman described how the chronic pressures of the system turned one young teacher from "the pretty, fresh-looking mistress, who smiled so gently and merrily" into "a pale terrible creature, capable of striking at a scholar"<sup>2</sup> and who ultimately died of exhaustion. When T.J. MacNamara, the secretary of the N.U.T. and editor of *The Schoolmaster* and *The Teacher's Aid*, took his turn at writing melodramas based on school life, he did not present the use of corporal punishment as a product of a system that was wholly wrong but rather viewed the use of the cane as teachers' only defence against the system.

The hero of one of his *Schoolmaster Sketches*, 'By Order Of The Board', was a young teacher, Charlie Ashford, in his first job after certification. Charlie had 80 pupils in his class who tried to see how far they could push their luck with him by singing during a lesson. At this point, clearly rising to his subject, MacNamara's narrative voice recedes and his own comments,

'Thrash a few' you say? Exactly. Only the school board, in its wisdom and well-intended ignorance of the true bearing of things, went shrieking mad if the lightest finger of correction were laid upon the sacred person of one of these dear little children by anybody save the head teacher.

And even *he* had to act with the most ridiculously painstaking caution. He had to enter what punishment he gave in a book specially provided for the purpose. And it was accounted to him for brutality if the number of his entries exceeded what ought, in the opinion of the dear kind lady who was the visiting member of the board, to have sufficed under the circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, 'The Treatment of Children in Schools', *The Clarion*, 4 Feb. 1893. Italics in original.

<sup>2</sup> J. Runciman, *School Board Idylls*, 77.



So Mills, the headmaster, naturally shrank from doing the right thing.<sup>1</sup>

The children continued to play up in Charlie's class until one day one of them hit him in the eye with a missile from a peashooter and Charlie's patience snapped. He hit the young marksman but unfortunately did so at exactly the same time that the Rev. Chawley (the leading local sentimentalist) from the board chose to enter the room. Charlie was sacked and, unable to find another post, committed suicide. As though MacNamara's stance on the issue of corporal punishment was not clear enough he added to this virulent outburst a personal anecdote of an occasion when he beat a child with the pieces of the frame of a broken writing slate. This, he claimed, earned him the respect of the children.

Each of the points which he made in this defence of corporal punishment were echoed by the membership of his union. A resolution of the N.U.T. Conference of 1889 sought to exempt schools from the provisions of a Bill designed to prevent cruelty to children. In 1893, 1895, and 1897 Conference passed a similar long resolution on corporal punishment which listed the advantages of corporal punishment and advocated giving assistant teachers the right to beat children since this would make their jobs easier. It was further argued that this would actually improve the relations between teachers and school managers and parents and would, moreover, increase the respect with which teachers were treated by the community at large by reducing the wilful defiance of children who knew they could escape unpunished. The use of a punishment book to record the administration of corporal punishment was opposed as it "places a premium upon equivocation, lying, deceit, and fraud."<sup>2</sup> A teacher who honestly recorded all the times which he beat the children would, like MacNamara's fictional Mills, accumulate 'black marks' which could be used against him.

This persecution was portrayed as being doubly unfair since, as a teacher wrote in a letter to *The Clarion*, "I have not only never had a serious complaint from parents, but those of my pupils who are now young men, generally admit that the punishment they received was both necessary and beneficial for themselves."<sup>3</sup> In 1888 a Wandsworth Magistrate by the name of Paget convicted the head teacher of Saunders Road School after a

<sup>1</sup> T. J. MacNamara, *Schoolmaster Sketches*, 98. Italics in original.

<sup>2</sup> 'Corporal punishment in schools: Paper read to the annual conference of the N.U.E.T. in 1883, by, Mr A. J. Clarkson of St Paul's School, Stratford, Essex.' *N.U.E.T. Annual Report 1883*, cxx.

<sup>3</sup> Letter entitled, 'The Treatment of Children in Schools', *The Clarion*, 25 March 1893.

beating incident. Teachers rallied to this cause and the Lambeth Teachers' Association passed a resolution wholly supportive of their colleague who, they claimed had been acting entirely legally and did not use undue force.<sup>1</sup> By 1888 Paget must have been something of a *bête noire* for London teachers since this case was a virtual re-run of one three years earlier when he had fined another teacher, Mr Cox, for beating a child. In a comment on this incident, in the letters page of *The Schoolmaster*, 'A Sympathiser' wrote that, "if Mr Paget could have a year's experience of board school teaching, and if his bread were dependent upon the results of his examination at the end of that time, his opinions on the subject of corporal punishment might undergo a wholesome alteration."<sup>2</sup> This demand to allow the teachers "say what is the best way of conducting their own work"<sup>3</sup> was thus, at base, a bread and butter issue.

Teachers might have felt that they were thus victimised by the misinformed and ignorant, such as Mr Paget and his fellow magistrates, but socialists saw these people as usually supportive of teachers. *The Labour Standard* reported the case of William Henry Wilkins, a teacher at Teddington School, who flogged a boy for insulting him outside the school's premises (he had called the teacher "short 'un"). In court "a medical certificate showed that the punishment was most severe, and that the boy's legs were badly bruised." The magistrate decided that no master could correctly punish a pupil for an offence committed outside the school and that where a beating was merited it should be administered by the headmaster. Notwithstanding these principles he still only imposed a "nominal fine of 2s 6d"<sup>4</sup> Unlike the N.U.T. socialists thought that magistrates were largely on the side of pedagogues in cases of brutality. Honnor Morten of the Society for the Reformation of School Discipline extended this belief in the partisan nature of officials to include members of school boards (who teachers viewed as a gang of misinformed sentimentalists) when she wrote that, "alas! the well-fed, well-housed board member is utterly dense and unsympathetic on this question. ... He has never had a dull boy come crying and trembling to him to show a striped hand, and had to try to persuade that child to go back to school."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> London School Board Minutes, June-Nov. 1888 pp 37 & 1337.

<sup>2</sup> Letter entitled, 'Corporal Punishment', *The Schoolmaster*, 28 March 1885.

<sup>3</sup> Letter entitled, 'The Treatment of Children in Schools', *The Clarion*, 25 March 1893.

<sup>4</sup> 'Corporal Punishment in Schools', *The Labour Standard*, 19 July 1884.

<sup>5</sup> Honnor Morten, *Inhumanity in Schools*, 7-8.

Corporal punishment was one area where the union was prepared to go to considerable lengths to forward its members' interests. As Henry Salt noted,

in view of ... the very powerful influence of the N.U.T., which can always supply its members with legal defence, the great body of working-class parents, which is compelled to send its children to schools where the cane is in constant use, is practically powerless. Scattered and unorganised as they are, it is difficult for individuals here and there to make a really effective protest against teachers' tyranny.<sup>1</sup>

When *The Clarion's* Simeon Twigg exposed the full extent of this brutal tyranny the union threatened to use this legal defence fund to sue him through the High Court.<sup>2</sup> Anna Davin has quoted Humphries's speculation that some of the parental anger generated by punishments inflicted on children may have been caused by "some slight distortion of events".<sup>3</sup> This presumably means that children would lie to reduce their own culpability and to paint a dark picture of their teacher when in fact they had deserved to be punished. It must, of course, be conceded that in all probability such 'distortions' existed and that, further, they may have been shown up for what they were in court. This is one possible conclusion. But it is also possible that some prosecutions in genuine cases of illegal brutality collapsed under pressure in court when the witnesses were confronted by the full majesty of the legal system and the hostility of the union's legal representatives. It is not unknown nowadays for child witnesses to give conflicting evidence or to retract statements. On other occasions even more devious means might be used to secure an acquittal. At the inquest into the death of one child, Charles Williams, who died from meningitis brought on by a blow to the ear by his teacher Mr. Ridewood, *The Socialist* claimed that the school board itself was able to pack the Coroner's Court jury to obtain a favourable verdict assisted by Ridewood's father who was the Coroner's officer.<sup>4</sup>

Ardent pursuit of such bread and butter issues could be seen by socialists as a necessary jumping off point for the workers on the road to their own political emancipation. However, not only was the specific end pursued by the teachers' unions actually opposed by socialists, the less than robust manner in which they conducted themselves in any industrial relations

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Salt, *The Flogging Craze*, 38-9.

<sup>2</sup> Simeon Twigg, 'Pedagogues on the Warpath', *The Clarion*, 19 Aug. 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 129.

<sup>4</sup> 'Brutality at a Board School', *The Socialist*, 14 July 1888.

matter (apart from their full-blooded pursuit of the right to beat children) earned extra contempt from socialists.

As well as attacking the whole moral basis of corporal punishment socialists took the struggle to the teachers on their own terms and criticised the manner of its implementation. This initiated some bitter exchanges through the correspondence columns of the socialist press. Socialists argued that the rules that governed the use of corporal punishment were “systematically violated”<sup>1</sup> in two ways. Firstly, it was routinely administered by assistant teachers and secondly, it was used not just as a punishment for serious breaches of discipline, but as a punishment for failure to learn a lesson. With regard to the former, teachers were keen to highlight the discrepancy that existed between the board and the voluntary schools, since in the latter, assistants were allowed to beat children. Board school assistants demanded parity of ‘rights’ with their colleagues in this church-controlled sector and made representations to boards to petition for assistants to have the right to beat children.<sup>2</sup> When socialists fought for equal rights they did so on the basis of levelling up and so were strongly opposed to this extension of ‘rights’ that would, in reality, have universalised the lowest moral denominator of the education system. Twigg maintained that assistant teachers beat ‘the dullards’ in a variety of sadistically inventive ways to encourage other children to work harder. J. Brown, writing to *The Clarion* agreed. “Many cases of punishing children are not because they misbehave, but because they cannot get on so quickly with their lessons as the master wishes them, and the prospect of a large £. s. d. looks gloomy.”<sup>3</sup>

Lowerison admitted that he did such things for these reasons and Twigg had no shortage of other examples.

In one of the voluntary schools - it is in the Manchester district - where all the teachers enjoy the blessed privilege of using the birch, a female teacher asked one of her scholars to do a portion of his lessons. He was unable to do it, whereupon this ‘angel of light’ knocked him against the form and made his nose bleed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simeon Twigg, ‘Whining Pedagogues’, *The Clarion*, 22 July 1893.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J.H. Bingham, *The Sheffield School Board 1870-1903*, 140-141.

<sup>3</sup> Letter entitled, ‘The Treatment of Children in School’, *The Clarion*, 11 March 1893.

<sup>4</sup> Simeon Twigg, ‘Whining Pedagogues,’ *The Clarion*, 22 July 1893.

Evidence of the prevalence of such practices can be found by reading between the lines in *Sonnenschein's Encyclopaedia of Education* where, under the heading of 'Corporal Punishment', readers were advised that the best site on the young body upon which to meet out the punishment was "the seat". However, this encyclopaedia also found it necessary to point out that "boxing of the ears or blows on the head of any description are inadvisable and even dangerous. So likewise are blows on the front of the chest or abdomen."<sup>1</sup>

Such columns as those of Twigg which gave publicity to this brutality provoked angry choruses of denials from teachers which lead to a round of gainsaying evidence-questioning, and, if we are to believe Twigg, also to the overloading of the Manchester Sorting Office. Twigg laid the issue to rest by quoting one teacher who had written to him. This particular pedagogue actually seemed to fail to understand what all the fuss was about. "Simeon Twigg says these regulations are being broken wholesale. Of course they are, and will be. Any teacher with 'backbone' in him *will refuse to be made the sport of the ill-disciplined urchins he sometimes comes across in school.*"<sup>2</sup>

Working-class children, these same 'ill-disciplined urchins', had a legal right to education and the fact that their teachers beat them, or threatened to do so, could detract greatly from the effective discharge of this duty. That poorly-clothed, overworked and malnourished children did not make the best of scholars was a self-evident fact to all socialists. What was equally obvious was that beating them would not encourage them to go to school. If poor children made mistakes it was because their senses were dulled by poverty. The cane would simply introduce new elements such as terror or sullen, angry defiance into the equation, either of which would place the children into a vicious circle of under-achievement.<sup>3</sup> Henry Salt, a staunch opponent of corporal punishment, recognised that as the ultimate solution for classroom ill-discipline (the removal of slums and the system that produced them) was necessarily a long-term project there would be problems in classrooms in the short term which would necessitate the use of

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<sup>1</sup> *Sonnenschein's Encyclopaedia of Education*, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Simeon Twigg, 'Pedagogues on the Warpath', *The Clarion*, 19 Aug. 1893. Italics in original.

<sup>3</sup> Honnor Morten, *Inhumanity in Schools*, 7-8.

sanctions by teachers. Nevertheless, in his view, nothing could be more counter productive than corporal punishment.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Ideal Teacher**

However, this is to leave open the whole question of what sort of punishments were considered acceptable to socialists? This in itself is part of a larger question concerning the nature of a good teacher. The answer to the former, smaller, question could lay in either the child being removed from group activities or being assigned some arduous but socially necessary task. When Lowerison set up Ruskin School Home in Norfolk he would leave naughty children behind at the school when he took others to the beach to swim, or they might be given an extra turn or two at the water pump.<sup>2</sup> A more proactive policy, one designed to prevent outbreaks of bad behaviour was also proposed. The Society for the Reformation of School Discipline had as one of its three objectives,

The institution of the American 'School City System', under which children acting as citizens and officials of their school as a 'city', under good guidance, make and enforce their own laws, thus in a practical way acquiring the principles of true citizenship and developing the faculties of self-government - the climax of education.<sup>3</sup>

When it came to the second issue, writing of 'the work in our Sunday schools', the *Labour Prophet* offered some basic advice to its volunteers on syllabus and classroom methodology and drew the conclusion that many good and intelligent people were failures as Sunday school teachers because they performed the function out of a sense of duty, rather than love. "Sunday School teachers, like poets, are born not made."<sup>4</sup> This was the most important criteria for most socialists. Leonard Hall in *The Clarion* wrote, "in the great task of selecting the teaching staff, personal character is the first qualification."<sup>5</sup> Margaret MacMillan noted that only a few exceptional teachers in public schools were truly able to inspire their pupils. As a solution she did not propose the wholesale recruitment of poets, but she did recommend the introduction of a system of ethical education and

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Salt, *The Flogging Craze*, 35-6.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Elaine Auger (nee Lowerison).

<sup>3</sup> 'Society for the reform of School Discipline', *I.L.P. News*, July 1901.

<sup>4</sup> 'Work in our Sunday Schools', *The Labour Prophet*, Dec. 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Hall, 'The School Board Election', *The Clarion*, 17 Nov. 1894.

character building, to fill the gap<sup>1</sup> and to remove from the classroom that type of teacher caricatured by Morris as 'Mr Choakumchild'.<sup>2</sup> However, she wanted to allow the teachers sufficient freedom to teach according to their personalities. The object of education was to free the minds of the pupils and to allow them to develop according to their own latent talents and this, she argued, could hardly be achieved by stifling the teachers with prescriptive mechanisms and programmes.<sup>3</sup>

Teachers needed to be sympathetic to their pupils and to be able to instil a socially responsible attitude into them by example. For Edward Carpenter the success of any true education was crucially dependent upon the character of the teacher, "the tenderness and self-restraint of which he is capable and on the ideal of life which he has in his mind."<sup>4</sup> Under its heading of 'Moral Education' *Sonnenschein's Encyclopaedia of Education* concurred with this view assigning a large influence to, "the educator's own moral example, which works through the impulse of imitation."<sup>5</sup> Sympathy for the pupils could be developed by the teacher placing himself in the position of the pupil by constantly learning, by sharing the children's games and by getting together with them in a natural setting on rambles and the like.<sup>6</sup> "A true schoolmaster will," as *Seed-time* phrased it, "seek to be with his pupils in their games as well as in their studies."<sup>7</sup> Teachers, Henry Salt argued, proceeded from the basis that children were naturally cruel. "Of course they are cruel" he wrote, "as long as the example is everywhere set them by their elders, and as long as those who are responsible for their religious and moral welfare, are content, or compelled, to leave them without instruction on the most important of ethical subjects."<sup>8</sup> Real teachers, he added, that is those who recognised and tried to meet this need, had no need of corporal punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *The Ethical End in Education*, 163-4. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A2A, 210.

<sup>2</sup> William Morris, 'Thoughts on Education Under Capitalism', *The Commonweal*, 30 June 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *The Ethical End in Education*, 101. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A2/A, 163-4.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Affection in Education*, 485.

<sup>5</sup> *Sonnenschein's Encyclopaedia of Education*, 228.

<sup>6</sup> 'Are our Schools Asleep?' *The Clarion*, 17 July 1897. And, H. Jennie Elcum, 'Schools and Education', *The Clarion*, 10 Oct. 1896.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Matter and Method of Moral Education', *Seed-time*, July 1892.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Salt, *Literae Humaniores*, 3-4.

## **Conclusion**

Insofar as it was underpinned by any philosophy at all the world view of teachers who used the cane was rooted in a Christian view of human nature. This was revealed to the readers of *The Teachers' Aid* by George Bosworth who argued that corporal punishment was unpleasant but necessary, "owing to the depravity of human nature".<sup>1</sup> Socialist ethics accepted that people had the ability to make moral choices which, for good or ill, could be of great significance. However, they parted company from such Christian moralising by applying different standards to children whose high-spirited innocence was seen as the hope of mankind, not the result of any curse.

A further point of departure from Christian morality was the firm link socialists made between the ethical and the material. Lowerison could, without offending his own excessive modesty, be reasonably said to fit the model of a good teacher outlined by Salt. However, he also admitted to beating the children at Wenlock Road School. The point here is that even a good man in a bad system could only achieve limited advances. It is argued by historians such as Patrick Joyce, David Howell and Stanley Pierson that the socialism of this period placed great emphasis upon the power of the individual to change the system through moral re-birth in the religion of socialism. The analysis of the education system brought forward by socialists was far more systematic than this.

Socialists sought to improve both the moral and the material welfare of people and the same was true in the case of teachers. Writing about the function of a teacher in *Seed-time*, Grace Heath observed that "the moral change must always move along with the economic change."<sup>2</sup> These economic factors included not only the terms of his employment, pay and work load, but also the quality of the education he was expected to deliver. Teachers were important people in the socialist world view. The care of the young mind was too important a job to be left to careerists but no good person would want to deliver the patent falsehoods of religion. Whole individuals could not be produced by such a curriculum. Socialism thus highlighted a series of links between the moral and the material where teachers were concerned. These included the need to spend more on education to reduce class sizes and so allow teachers to work compassionately and effectively, but there was also a strong focus on the

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<sup>1</sup> George F. Bosworth, 'Some Thoughts on Discipline', *The Teachers' Aid*, 8 Dec. 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Grace Heath, 'The Function of a Teacher', *Seed-time*, Oct. 1893.



link between the substantive content of the education delivered and the quality of those who delivered it. This aspect of the socialist critique of teachers was underpinned by the presence in the movement of a powerful view of the ideal alternative curriculum. This is the subject of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 3

## Socialist education: ideals and practice

This, then, is the aim of our conduct, - to have in a satisfied body, a free, active, and gratified mind.  
John C. Kenworthy, 'Culture and Socialism',  
*The Commonweal*, 31 May 1890.

A common narrative device in utopian writings of this period was for a person from the 1880s or 1890s fall asleep and wake up in the future. Had any of the socialists whose work is examined here actually done this, and had they woken up, in 1911, to read a small tract called *Watchman Awake!* they would have thought that all the effort they had expended in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to establish new educational structures was coming to fruition. The author of this pamphlet, St Clare Norris, argued that the eponymous watchman needed, in the words of the subtitle, to wake up in order to “Save the Children” from the danger posed by “the insidious action of an organisation which, like a thief in the night, has taken the Sunday afternoon school work and used it for widely different ends.”<sup>1</sup> These few pages were thus an, “effort to expose and stem the **greatest wrong** that the **children can suffer** in this life, the **loss of their glorious faith**.”<sup>2</sup> The snake in the grass identified as the agent of this perfidious subversion was the socialist Sunday school movement the evil influence of which Norris felt was “increasing not abating.”<sup>3</sup> This would have cheered the time-travelling socialists since it was for precisely this reason that they had worked to establish these schools.

Subverting the established hypocrisies that masqueraded as morality under the heading of religion was very important to socialists. But the construction of a new ethic was not their only aim. In fact this moral aim

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<sup>1</sup> St. Clare Norris, *Watchman Awake Save the Children*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* Emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

was combined in the thought and practices of the movement with the material and this was also true in the educational packages that socialists designed for children. When these were published as books some of them may well have been given titles such as F.J. Gould's *Moral Instruction* or *Moral Lessons for Children* but this, as will be seen below, did not mean that they were about morality in total abstraction. Thus it was that in his introduction to Gould's *Pages for Young Socialists* Hyndman praised the author for adopting a new curriculum combining in its lessons the "higher human qualities of ... love and sympathy ... with an understanding that economics and the system of [the] distribution of resources underlay all societies."<sup>1</sup> This chapter will focus on socialist attempts to educate children beyond their agitation to improve the social provision of education. These 'private' educational initiatives brought the movement up against the hunger of working-class children. An examination of the attitudes and ideas highlighted by the ensuing debate within the movement will form the subject of the first section of this chapter.

### **The moral and the material in socialist education - a healthy mind in a healthy body**

Socialist educational packages assumed many forms. There were fairy stories, works on natural history, economic lessons and morality tales. There were also schools with their incumbent methodological guidelines to aid the teaching of these programmes. Various authors were able to emphasise whichever constituent element and form of the overall curriculum best suited their tastes and knowledge. Some highlighted the material whilst others stressed the moral. It would be a mistake to ascribe any one individual or an organisation permanently and solely to either of these categories. For the moral commentaries were often used as to initiate highly political critiques and the material works often commented on the unjustness of the prevailing order and the hypocrisy of its defenders. Moreover, even exclusively moral or materialist works, did not exist in a vacuum. They were written from and used by a movement where they were one of many currents. Though these can be categorised and examined separately by the historian they were present at the time in a movement where they reinforced, and coalesced around each other. The moral and the material elements of these packages reinforced each other even if they were

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<sup>1</sup> H.M. Hyndman, introduction to, F.J. Gould, *Pages for Young Socialists*, V11.

written separately. Thus even in cases where one finds an apparently moral or material educational package it must be viewed within its context, which presupposed the existence elsewhere in the movement, of the other.

The existence of a range of attitudes to education inside the socialism of this period has allowed one historian to conclude that the S.D.F., for example, “believed that education, *any* education could sweep away ignorance and so help develop socialism.”<sup>1</sup> However, this is to mistake diversity for chaos and to assume that because there were a large number of constituent elements in the socialist position that there was no underlying unity at all and that literally anything goes. This analysis is faulty, for if “*any* education”, would really meet the desired ends, what were the socialists of the time making such a fuss about in the first place? Why did they bother to write and establish their own forms of education? For “*any* education” would presumably include the religious education beaten into children, learned by rote and crammed for a rigid examination system that was served up in many schools in the 1880s and 1890s. However, these were things which absolutely no socialist would accept under any circumstances and which were notable only by their absence from socialist educational programmes.

In turn of the century socialism a union of the moral and the material was widely seen as essential “the one without the other will not advance mankind very far”.<sup>2</sup> Where education was concerned, this was encapsulated in the demand that children should be allowed to have a healthy mind in a healthy body.<sup>3</sup> Working-class mothers were ignorant and poor and these twin evils acted in consort to reproduce themselves. This necessitated a twin track solution. Enid Stacey made this the cornerstone of her interpretation of the meaning of education from a socialist point of view. “Consider first one of the chief conditions for a truly educated being - a healthy body.”<sup>4</sup> She went on to show how the upper and middle classes had this prerequisite while the bulk of the people were deprived both by the poverty of their home environment and the paucity of public education provision. From this she went on to argue for an improvement in the material dimension of life, but also for an increase in the school-leaving age

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<sup>1</sup> Hilda Kathleen Kean, *State Education Policy 1900 - 1930: The nature of the socialist and teacher trades unionist response*, 69. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> A.S. Headingley, ‘The Moral and Material Aspects of Socialism’, *Justice*, 1 June 1901.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, John C. Kenworthy, ‘Culture and Socialism’, *The Commonweal*, 31 May 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Enid Stacey, *Education: its Meaning. A Socialist point of view*, 4 & 10.

and a greatly enhanced curriculum that together would produce rounded individuals, not the “lopsided”<sup>1</sup> specimens turned out by the existing system. The role of the first grade of school envisaged by Richardson in his extensive and laboriously detailed utopian work was “to develop the body [and] train the mind to think.”<sup>2</sup> On this point *Justice* concurred. Socialism, it wrote,

must see that in cultivating the mind we do not starve the body, and that the body is so well cared for that it shall not impede the improvement of the mind. It must see that our material comforts are such as will allow full scope to the development of our moral attributes and that we show ourselves worthy of whatever prosperity we enjoy.<sup>3</sup>

The development of these higher moral attributes was the work of the proposed school syllabus, while the improvement of the material conditions was encapsulated in the policy of State Maintenance. This was one of the defining elements of almost any socialist educational package in this period. In essence what was being demanded here was the creation of a form of welfare state focused on the school and built round the publicly-funded education and feeding of children. It is notable that the two were to occur simultaneously. What was proposed was not that parents be provided with welfare payments and entrusted to look after their children’s physical welfare because such a policy would have given de-facto support to the private and closed nature of the Victorian family norm and would thus have left children’s minds to the mercy of whatever falsehoods their parents adhered. Rather, since the system was designed to effect both the moral and material advancement of children socialists sought its implementation through public schools where both sorts of progress could best be guaranteed since, firstly, the one without the other was of no real use and, secondly, since neither could be guaranteed unless they occurred in a publicly-controlled setting under the aegis of democratically elected school boards.

Thus socialists were in no doubt about what they would do with the power of school boards if only they could conquer them. For example Leonard Hall wrote that the pupils of board schools should be taught the benefits of

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> John Richardson, *How it can be done*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> A.S. Headingley, ‘The Moral and Material Aspects of Socialism’, *Justice*, 1 June 1901.

co-operation, trades unionism and socialism.<sup>1</sup> In *The Labour Leader* Fred Green advocated that children be taught that, “to be brothers and sisters is greater and nobler than to be Smilesian hyenas and blacklegs” and coupled this with a demand that they be fed whilst digesting this lesson.<sup>2</sup> Lowerison campaigned actively for these types of policies. In a lecture delivered as part of a Fabian series of School Board Lectures in June 1894 he argued for secular education, free school meals, increased physical education, the abolition of the examination system and the system of cramming that it produced. These were the central planks of any socialist education programme in the period and Lowerison was convinced that they could only be provided by “collective effort”.<sup>3</sup> The provision of true education would be one of the hallmarks of the co-operative commonwealth and would have as its goal the “leading out of the child's best faculties.”<sup>4</sup> F. J. Gould, another socialist educator, was similarly engaged in practical work on the Leicester School Board. Thus, even when they were concentrating on the education of children, these two socialist educationalists did not neglect the vital campaign for an improvement in the material conditions of children's lives.

If they had rate-raising powers through the control of school boards it was clear how socialists would spend the resources of the public purse. However, many areas did not have a school board, and where they did exist there was often an uphill struggle ahead if socialists attempted to establish a presence. In the absence of this public provision to meet a public need socialists initiated their own educational programmes. These were designed to fulfil a dual function of turning out socialists and acting as a spur to the state education system by providing an example of best practice. However, these initiatives threw up a serious dilemma for the movement. Socialists believed that society, through the State, had a duty to tend to the welfare of children because it was impossible to educate a hungry child. In setting out to educate children socialists themselves were trying to carry out precisely this impossible mission, because, there were occasions when they attempted

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Hall, ‘The School Board Elections’, *The Clarion*, 17 Nov. 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Fred E. Green, ‘Labour and the School Board’, *The Labour Leader*, 19 May 1894. See also, H.W. Hobart, ‘Education part III - Secondary’, *Justice*, 14 July 1894.

<sup>3</sup> *Fabian News*, July 1894. He also promoted the socialist perspective on a wide range of other material issues. Titles of his lectures included: ‘The Nationalisation of the Railways’, ‘News From Nowhere’, ‘The Labour Programme’, ‘The Scope of Trades Unionism’, ‘The Eight Hour Day’, and, ‘Bread and Butter Politics’. See notices in, *Fabian News*, Oct. 1891 (Supplement), March 1891, Dec. 1891, Jan. 1892, Nov. 1892, Dec. 1893, and April 1894.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, ‘Something to be thankful for’, *Justice*, 17 June 1893.

to feed the children as well. The debates that sprang up round this task were given an added impetus by the fact that, as a product of its systematic analysis of society, socialism generally recognised the inadequacy of philanthropy, which of course was what these feeding missions were, and again by the fact that, of all the philanthropic attempts organised to provide relief to the poor in late Victorian society, those made by socialists were probably the worst-funded.

The debate sparked off by this dilemma is most noticeable in an examination of the Cinderella movement. The Cinderella movement was initiated by Robert Blatchford in 1889 and has since been known for its glee-club type activities, providing treats, teas, shows and outings for the most needy of the slum children of the late Victorian and Edwardian period. The dilemma which this activity presented to socialists is obvious when one realises that the clubs were not always simply glee clubs for there was an attempt to turn some of these clubs into Cinderella Schools.

In a highly sentimental article in *The Labour Prophet* of June 1893 Robert Blatchford described the thought processes that led to the formation of the Cinderellas. He took the credit for the foundation of the Cinderellas and was often the object of 'three cheers' at the end of Cinderella treats for impoverished children. Those Cinderella workers who advocated the prioritising of feeding over education would often quote Blatchford as the authority behind their activities, but he himself was unsure about the role envisaged for the Cinderellas. In May 1893 *The Labour Prophet* carried, under the heading of 'Cinderella Schools, a new departure', a report of a meeting of the committee of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church which concluded that, "our movement so far has been chiefly puffed up. The time has come when we must resolutely set our hands to build it up. Let us make a start with the children."<sup>1</sup> Blatchford was at this meeting and made some suggestions about how the children could best be educated. He was recorded as having been in favour of women teachers who would teach their pupils the correct use of plain simple English. The meeting voted in favour of the children being trained to think for themselves. On another occasion when he visited the Manchester Cinderella Group, after the 153 children present had eaten their supper and heard some songs from their hosts, "a short lecture on economics was given to the children by Nunquam, who, with the aid of a blackboard and a piece of chalk was able, very

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<sup>1</sup> 'Cinderella Schools: a new departure', *The Labour Prophet*, May 1893.

effectively, to fix the attention of the children on what he was showing them.”<sup>1</sup>

The Cinderella movement was one of the key institutions through which socialists established contact with the children of the slums. As such it was inevitable perhaps that differences of opinion about the correct relative prioritisation of feeding and education surfaced in this forum. In the Cinderella column of *The Clarion* of March 1897 the Edinburgh group reported that they found themselves troubled by “the usual questions” that beset people engaged in this line of work. These included “should we teach them socialism?”<sup>2</sup> Further down the same page the Birmingham group provided one implacable answer.

There seems to me too much anxiety among the clubs to teach. Well, we in Birmingham, during the four years we have been at work, have never mentioned the word ‘socialism’; and what’s more, we’re proud of it. ... Teaching is in direct opposition to the spirit in which Nunquam started the Cinderellas.<sup>3</sup>

Such an attitude clearly needs explaining. It is possible to discern two motivating factors which may, in various cases, have been at work here.

The first of these, which raised the vexed question of the relationship between socialism and philanthropy, was the movement’s conscience. As the Cinderella movement drifted away from overtly socialist work and into something that looked very much like the philanthropy against which socialism had railed so angrily for years<sup>4</sup> John Trevor found himself on the horns of this dilemma.

Believing as I do, that socialism of any worthy sort includes philanthropy, but also goes far nearer to the root of our evils than philanthropy alone can ever do, I should be very sorry to divert money away from socialist to merely philanthropic purposes. But socialists need to have the philanthropic inclination - without it they are cold and callous and one-sided.<sup>5</sup>

F.J. Gould and Harry Lowerison both shared this belief that the philanthropic impulse was a laudable one in an individual but a bad basis on

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Cinderellas’, *The Clarion*, 25 March 1893.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Cinderella Clubs’, *The Clarion*, 13 March 1897.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, for example, wrote of “the putrid whiff of charity.” *England’s Ideal*, 5. See also, Waters, *British Socialists*, 88-89.

<sup>5</sup> John Trevor, ‘Educational’, *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1893.



which to run a society. Acting on these beliefs their educational programmes encouraged the children under their guidance to undertake such works whilst at the same time attempting to teach them the truths about alternative and better methods of structuring social relationships. In common with the Labour Pioneers organised through *The Labour Leader*, children attending socialist Sunday schools often undertook philanthropic works with either workhouse children, or, those at the Cinderellas. The children who attended Lowerison's Ruskin School Home would give charity concerts at the village hall to raise money for the local poor.<sup>1</sup>

Since the socialist movement in these years placed a very high emphasis on morality and on practising what one preached it is easy to see how socialists would find it difficult to close their eyes and harden their hearts to the scenes of such appalling need as characterised the slums of late-Victorian Britain. The victimisation of children by the system was perhaps the one thing that above all else was most likely to galvanise any self-respecting socialist into action. However, the bulk of the movement's writers, and a considerable number of its Cinderella workers were able to grit their teeth and argue that, either the private feeding of children was, whoever undertook it, such a small drop in the ocean of poverty as to be pointless, or, that it only had a point if it were coupled to long-term attempts to change the system through education. This reasoning, above all when it was applied to such an emotive topic as child poverty, served to demonstrate both the understanding of the systematic nature of poverty that underlay socialism in the 1880s and 1890s, and the linkage between the moral and the material that it engendered in the socialist response.

Lowerison felt the philanthropic tug on his conscience perhaps harder than most. It was when he was in charge of the London Clarion Field Club in 1895 that the club set up its own Cinderella.<sup>2</sup> In 1901 this club began to run the Cinderella House at Tatsfield which was subsequently adopted by the London Clarion Fellowship. There is no record of the type of work that the club carried out under Lowerison but by 1903 it clearly operated very much in the glee-club mode. However, even if this was all that the club did in the 1890s it would be wrong to view this in isolation from the wider campaigning work that Lowerison undertook, and his belief that the ideal

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, 'Ruskin School Home', *The Clarion*, 27 Aug. 1909. And, 'Ruskin School', *The Clarion*, 29 July 1910.

<sup>2</sup> This club and its work are recorded in, *The 1903 Cinderella Annual*, 73-74.

for which socialists should strive was state provision of what was here being provided by socialists.<sup>1</sup> This, it must of course be remembered, could be equally true of other members and other Cinderellas.

The second argument brought forward to justify the glee-club type of Cinderellas was that they were actually used for the eminently socialist activity of contacting the parents of children entertained at Cinderella treats. Despite stressing some political credentials in its name the Liverpool Socialist Cinderella seems to have operated very much on the club mode but its secretary Harry Worrall reported that it printed socialist mottoes on its tickets as a means of getting such thoughts into the poorest working class homes “in most cases for the first time.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise the club in the Potteries refused to teach socialism but used its meetings as a chance to distribute *The Clarion* to the children at going-home time.<sup>3</sup> In Salford the Cinderella workers delivered tickets to the homes of the poorest children and used the opportunity to get in touch with their parents.<sup>4</sup>

The real difference of opinion within the movement did not surface over the Liverpool type of Cinderella which used the Club for outreach work but over those such as Birmingham which divorced the need for a healthy body from that for a healthy mind and who, in the Cinderellas at least, did nothing overtly socialist at all but simply provided a bun and a bit of fun. Many members of the movement viewed these as being little better than a prop to the system in that they divorced the palliative from any socialist strategic considerations and thus fostered the belief that ameliorative measures could suffice whereas in fact there were two good reasons why they were grossly inadequate.

Firstly, this was still private philanthropy and so could never solve the structural inequalities and inequities of the capitalist system. Thus one author in *The Labour Prophet*, for example, regarded the attempts of the clubs to provide what society was unwilling furnish, a decent standard of living, as “quite inadequate to our needs.”<sup>5</sup> Neither individual effort on the part of the workers themselves nor philanthropic gestures on the part of the well-to-do could make a real difference to the status quo since this was the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lowerison, *Fields and Folklore*, 53.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Cinderella Clubs’, *The Clarion*, 10 April 1897.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Julia Dawson, ‘The Cinderella Column’, *The Clarion*, 18 Dec. 1897.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Sunday Schools’, *The Labour Prophet*, July 1895.

wholesale, widespread and systematic product of a mode of life. The charitable provision of free school meals for example was seen as being inadequate but also, more importantly, it was morally demeaning and acted to pauperise its recipients and thus played a part in prolonging the system whose inevitable effects it ostensibly set out to alleviate. This understanding was the background to the demands for State Maintenance.

Secondly, the Cinderellas that simply fed children ignored the education of the rising generation and so delivered these plastic minds to the indoctrination of existing education whether delivered by board schools, voluntary schools, or Sunday schools where they would be turned into the tools of the system. Other socialists could not leave the children to this fate and in the absence of a proper state education, sought to provide some education themselves by supplementing the miserable doles of the state school system whilst continuing to campaign for the state feeding of all children at school. This raised the related questions of what did they try to teach and how did they attempt to do so? While these issues are being addressed it needs to be borne in mind that these educational initiatives took place alongside a vigorous agitation to achieve a fair and equitable state education system providing food and education for children (this will be the subject of chapter five). The main exemplars of the educational programmes put forward by socialists discussed here are F. J. Gould and Harry Lowerison. These two were in many ways typical socialists of the period and thus both their shared points of emphasis and their differences of opinion are illuminating of the movement in general within which context their works will be examined.

### **Making Healthy Minds: Socialist Education**

In 1894 in an article called 'Socialism and the Rising Generation', *Justice* wrote that "the minds of children are fresh and clear from prejudice. ... Their sense of right and wrong is nearly always correct."<sup>1</sup> This clear and explicit rejection of the Christian belief in the innate wickedness of mankind was repeated two years later when the paper continued this theme adding that "children are eminently socialistic, they do not look upon all strangers as their natural enemies, as most grown people do."<sup>2</sup> In fact, in

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<sup>1</sup> 'Socialists and the Rising Generation', *Justice*, 29 Dec. 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Egeria, 'The Ethics of Socialism', *Justice*, 8 June 1896.

Lowerison's case, he found that his son Gordon was ready to view each and every one of the East Enders relaxing on the promenade at Southend as his friends.<sup>1</sup> Katherine Conway observed that no child could blithely ignore evidence of poverty and degradation in the way that adults did<sup>2</sup> and Enid Stacey wrote that a child, who "instinctively recognises the difference between truth and falsehood",<sup>3</sup> learned the hardened cynicism that characterised the relations between adults in the individualist society of the 1880s and 1890s from witnessing the example of parents lying to trades people, friends and each other. So shocking was this revelation to the infant understanding of the world that children would actually grieve when it first became apparent that their parents lied. When Tressell's fictional Frank Owen moved his family to Mugsborough he was spurned by his neighbours because of his atheism and socialism, but try as they might these neighbours could not prevent their children from playing with young Frankie Owen "for left to themselves the children disregarded all such distinctions."<sup>4</sup> Children thus represented all that was potentially good in humanity. An uncorrupted innocence that was untainted by the sophistries of the capitalist 'social' order and demonstrated instead a natural open desire for justice and fellowship.

In one sense, therefore, socialist education was thus not based on putting things into the heads of children but rather on drawing out what was seen to be already there. A correspondent to *The Clarion's* Cinderella column wrote that the purpose of the educational work undertaken at Cinderellas was to "give free scope to individuality."<sup>5</sup> Similarly in his pamphlet *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools* Whitehead wrote that the true educational ideal should be, "to *draw out* rather than to cram in."<sup>6</sup> In making an appeal to the School Board electors of Sunderland *The Socialist* pointed out that, "true education ought to be the drawing-out of the powers of body, mind and soul."<sup>7</sup> Socialism was often accused by its detractors of seeking to reduce all people to a drab uniformity and of stifling all individuality. In the liberal discourse the individual was seen as competitive and self-interested. Socialists were aligned against such traits

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, *In England Now*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Conway, *Socialism for Children*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Enid Stacey, *Education: Its Meaning. A Socialist point of view*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 77.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from J.P., 'Cinderella Clubs', *The Clarion*, 10 June 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> 'School Board Election', *The Socialist*, Dec.-Jan. 1894-95.

and, in adopting their position, they did not see themselves as oppressing something natural but rather the opposite. They were removing an unnatural blockage that prevented people from realising their true and full individuality which could only be achieved in concert with others, in a social setting. As Harry Quelch argued in an editorial in *Justice*, “the duty of the community as regards the education of the children is to see ... that their characters shall be trained with a view to the fullest development of the social instinct.”<sup>1</sup> The key words were development and instinct. There was nothing artificial about this education. This was emphasised by Margaret MacMillan, who wrote that it was wrong to try to teach infants anything at all, and that the best basis for any subsequent education was to allow children to play and develop naturally in these years.<sup>2</sup>

The widespread belief within the socialist movement that children were inherently socialistic and, therefore, attuned to socialist ethical appeals may lead to the expectation that here one might encounter the nexus of an ‘ethical’ socialism, one that sought to make a universalist approach to the children of humanity rather than those of a class. But an examination of the programmes put forward by socialists for the education of children demonstrates that this was not the case. Quelch’s view was that children’s latent social instincts needed to be nurtured and developed by education, that training was needed to realise what was dormant. *Seed-time* also recognised, “the sense of human sympathy and love needs stirring, the large, indefinite ideals so common among children need to be moulded into life by the force of education.”<sup>3</sup> Part of this involved the imparting of facts about the current ethical and social ordering of the world with which a comparison could be made. The moral and material shortcomings of the existing ‘social’ order could, on this basis, be drawn out and thus the child’s latent socialism was realised through a critique of the distribution of power and resources sanctioned by the prevailing order. Those who upheld the moral justifications of this order could also be held up for criticism and blamed for their shortcomings.

This pattern can be seen in Katherine Bruce Glasier’s work *Socialism for Children*. There was nothing at all that could be described as ‘universalist’

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Quelch, ‘Secular Education’, *Justice*, 26 May 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Margaret MacMillan to Mr Jowett, 11 Dec. 1905. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A94/6 1/6A.

<sup>3</sup> Thyra Christiane Lange, ‘Suggestions for the Ideal in Education’, *Seed-time*, April 1896.

anywhere in these sixteen pages. They presented the socialist material programme in simple language. This included an analysis of how the law supported the luxurious lifestyle of capitalists, how these idlers used this legal system to exploit the workers both on the land and in the factories and how these, the mass of the people, were responsible for the production of all the necessities of life yet were kept in poverty and squalor if not starvation. "Now why do the people not make plenty of food and clothing and houses and schools for themselves? ... In Britain, as in most other countries ... laws have been made which have allowed a few people to hold possession of the land ... and also of the big factories."<sup>1</sup> She argued forcefully that all children should be provided with the best education that society was able to provide, but that this was impossible under the prevailing distribution of resources and that therefore this had to be changed.

Similarly *The Democrat* contained a Children's page, 'The Children's Democrat', which was a socialist exposition of the economic and political debates of the day presented in relatively simple language for children. Topics covered included, the monarchy, unemployment, emigration and teetotalism. After a few months this format was abandoned and the paper published fairy tales, complete with the usual cast of characters such as wicked witches. The economic and political points underlying the stories, however, remained the same.<sup>2</sup>

## **F. J. Gould's Work**

Frederick James Gould, who would in later life become Hyndman's biographer,<sup>3</sup> was born in Brighton in 1855. He was a village school master in Chenies, Buckinghamshire, and from 1880 to 1896 he taught in two East End schools for the London School Board. The second of these, Northey Street School, was on the banks of the river. It was while he worked there that, like Lowerison, he was drawn to socialism as a result of the dock strike of 1889. "The great dock strike agitated the district, and drew me into a closer study of the Labour problem."<sup>4</sup> He was a prolific writer on secularism and on ethical or moral education. These works were

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Bruce Glasier, *Socialism for Children*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *The Democrat*, 1 Jan. 1889, 1 Feb. 1889 and 1 July 1889.

<sup>3</sup> F.J. Gould, *Hyndman, Prophet of Socialism*.

<sup>4</sup> F.J. Gould, *Lifestory of a Humanist*, 67.

recommended for use in socialist Sunday schools.<sup>1</sup> As a member of the Leicester School Board (he was elected in October 1900) he conducted a one-man enquiry into the teaching of morality through scripture classes which he found wanting in all respects.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this work he developed what he termed a course of “instruction on personal and civic duties.”<sup>3</sup> He was keen to instil in children a sense that as individuals they could make a difference to the lives of others. In an address, delivered at the South Place Children's flower service in 1897, he took as his theme ‘little things’. He told his audience that just as little touches of Michaelangelo's chisel could ultimately produce a great work of art so “little hands and little brains can build up a Kingdom of Righteousness - a Golden City.”<sup>4</sup>

In his 1900 publication *Moral Instruction* he laid out his general approach to methodology in the classroom. “Education must allow for more conduct and less lecturing, and the conduct must be transformed into neighbourly conduct.” To achieve this neighbourliness he advocated exercises in four aspects of civic life. Firstly, there was what he called “social alertness”. This consisted of personal and environmental cleanliness, respect for public order, and an understanding of one's civic duties such as voting. Secondly, there was ordered recreation as opposed to a mere romp. Thirdly, excursions were to be arranged to places that gave concrete examples of the organic nature of social life such as cathedrals, castles, local authority buildings, harbours, light houses, mines and factories. Lastly the practice of charitable works and visits to the less fortunate was to be encouraged.<sup>5</sup>

Gould had sketched out the broad parameters of how these lessons ought to be taught in a *Labour Prophet* article of 1893. Here he suggested that the children in socialist Sunday schools be divided into two groups, juniors and seniors, roughly on age lines, and that classes begin at 3.00p.m. with a socialist hymn and that lessons were as far as possible illustrated with pictures or, even better, magic lantern slides (though there was a problem in

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, George Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> F.J. Gould, *Life Story of a Humanist*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from F.J. Gould to A.R. Wallace, 24 Nov. 1897. British Library Add Manu, 46441, f155.

<sup>4</sup> F. J. Gould, ‘Little Things, an address delivered at the south place children's flower service, 2 May 1897’. In, ‘Cinderella, a paper for the Children’, *The Labour Prophet*, June 1897.

<sup>5</sup> F.J. Gould, *Moral Instruction*, 175.

finding slides that were good enough to illustrate the lessons in the “new morality of the great Labour movement.”<sup>1</sup>)

Around the turn of the century Gould produced a series of four books of *Children's Moral Lessons*. The titles of the chapters revealed his overall approach. The list included: ‘Kindness’, ‘Work Duty and Labour’, ‘Justice’, ‘Habits of Self Control’, ‘Mutual Dependence and the Social Organism’, ‘The Work of State and Citizen’, ‘Co-operation and Peace’, ‘The Study of Nature’, ‘The Study of Art’ and ‘Play’ (which focused on the co-operative nature of teams). These lessons were structured in the form of stories that could be read to the children and which concluded with an obvious moral that Gould recommended be elicited from them. A favourite form for some of these was that of a modern fable. In these two Europeans, one stereotypical decadent and the other equally predictably upright, were often compared through the eyes of a ‘simple’ native of the colonies, one as yet untainted by the sophistry and sycophancy of capitalist society. Here, as with the belief that children were inherently social and had to be taught how not to be so, one can detect a resonance of the idea that the socialist ethical perception was the natural order of humanity. For example, in lessons 35 to 37 of Series Two, which covered the subject of “work”, a Maori labelled a modest and hard-working Bishop a “gentleman gentleman” and a rich and idle merchant a “pig gentleman”.<sup>2</sup> The morals to be learned from this were that “every healthy man or woman ought to work with brain or hand” and that this “promotes health and cheerfulness, and wins for us the respect and honour of our neighbours.”<sup>3</sup>

There was in these tales a clear linkage between the moral and the material. They were not presentations of morality in abstraction but rather moral commentaries on the distribution of power and resources in society. Gould's lessons did not seek to examine the economic reasons for these disparities but they drove home clearly and persistently the simple moral message that the existing system was wrong. Section 6 of Series Four grouped together eleven lessons under the heading ‘Wealth’, the overall message was plain. “But how much do we need to live on? I cannot say just what each of us need; but I am quite sure that we do not need nearly so

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<sup>1</sup> F.J. Gould, ‘An Ethical Sunday School’, *The Labour Prophet*, Nov. 1893.

<sup>2</sup> F. J. Gould, *Children's Moral Lessons 2nd Series*, 169-170.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 162 & 166.



much as rich people possess.”<sup>1</sup> The lessons went on to show the possibility of re-ordering social relationships to produce a society where “there will be no rich or poor, but all will live in comfort.”<sup>2</sup>

Gould had been active in local government in Leicester and the section called ‘Government’ drew very heavily upon this experience. It clearly illustrated the local nature of the socialist vision of the state. This was praised warmly in these lessons and was seen as being morally and materially beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, it drew people into the civic life of their community and thus strengthened the collectivity as opposed to the individual. Secondly, local government was able to have a very significant effect on the quality of people’s material well being which, in turn, both reinforced their attachment to the collective and enabled them to lead more fulfilling lives. Here Gould’s lessons highlighted the work of local government in providing not only clearly uplifting facilities such as museums, galleries, parks and schools, but also, more prosaically, refuse collection, street cleaning, sanitation and trams. This highlighted the common perception of the reciprocity between the moral advancement of the people and their material well-being.

Just as every man or woman ought to work so Gould also believed that children should work hard at their lessons. Though he issued a plea for more activity in the classroom and less lecturing to children this did not mean that children were to be left to their own devices. His call for structured play activities made plain that his approach was not at one with Lowerison’s which focused on allowing children to behave in a natural way. Gould demanded from them a relatively high level of studiousness. If socialism was latent in children it could only be activated, according to Gould, if the children became educated in such a way as to be able to effect the changing of society to one based on this new ethical principle. In another of his books of lessons, *Life And Manners* there is a tale called ‘The Coati Mundi’. In this story a group of Muslim scholars from Spain who were studying in the east were distracted from their books by a passing parade which was led by an elephant, a great novelty full of wonder to these Europeans. Only one of their number remained at his work and it was he alone who ended up achieving the aims for which they had all made the

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<sup>1</sup> F.J. Gould, *The Children’s Book of Moral Lessons 4th Series*, 73.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 80.

journey.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to *The Worker's Cry* Paul, of North Whetstone, echoed this view that hard work was a necessary part of the child's learning process. Like Morris he was strongly opposed to the trash put out by the capitalist publishing houses for the consumption of the working class. His particular hatred was for the genre he labelled "The Boy's Yarn Spinner". No man, he wrote, ever became great by reading such rubbish "nor was a great leader", such as the British working class desperately needed, "ever nurtured by various doses of half penny comic papers."<sup>2</sup>

In those Cinderellas which chose to teach the children, and in socialist Sunday schools, the subjects or lessons chosen could often bear a striking resemblance, both in tone and content, to those of Gould, though they placed much less of an emphasis on developing habits of studiousness than he did. In July 1893, *The Labour Prophet* announced that Ben Mundall of Hull was the winner of the ten shilling prize in a competition the paper had been running which asked competitors to describe what they would do with "ten Cinderella ragamuffins for thirty minutes of a Sunday afternoon". Mundall's scheme was to instruct in a way that was enjoyable and the paper printed his suggested course. The first object he proposed was to establish a fellow feeling of kinship and mutual confidence between teacher and children. This would be used to deliver a four week course called "brave deeds". The chosen exemplars, one for each week, were Lifeboat Men, Merchant Seamen, Colliers, and Soldiers and Sailors. After this he suggested moving on to teach the children practical lifesaving skills leading up to the awards of the St John's Ambulance organisation.<sup>3</sup>

The socialist Sunday schools again followed a similar pattern of instruction. One sample lesson suggested showing how the letters of the alphabet had to 'co-operate' together in order to convey a meaning that as individuals was beyond them.<sup>4</sup> Another suggested that the same end could be achieved by getting the children to build a chair from a kit of parts from which one leg had been removed.<sup>5</sup> The schools tried to include nature rambles and to make all lessons as enjoyable as possible.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> F.J. Gould, *Life and Manners*, 28-31.

<sup>2</sup> Letter entitled, 'Educate !! Educate !! Educate !!' *The Workers' Cry*, 1 Aug. 1891.

<sup>3</sup> 'Cinderella Schools', *The Labour Prophet*, July 1893.

<sup>4</sup> *The Labour Prophet*, June 1898, 190.

<sup>5</sup> George Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

## **Harry Lowerison and Ruskin School Home**

### **Background**

Harry Lowerison's work at Ruskin School Home tried to combine the best effects of both work and play. He set up the School in 1899 after he was dismissed from his post at Wenlock Road School in Hackney as a result of his letter writing to the socialist press.<sup>1</sup> In these letters, published in *The Clarion* under the title 'My Ideal School', Lowerison set out the principles on which he would found Ruskin School Home.<sup>2</sup> He planned firstly, to teach the laws of health and exercise, secondly, to teach, by example, habits of justice and gentleness and thirdly, to discover, draw out and develop the natural capabilities of each child focusing on their power of reasoning. These articles attracted a large postbag and the scheme was realised at a meeting at Cartmel Robinson's vicarage on 16 December 1899. Some money had been spontaneously donated or pledged to Lowerison but the bulk of the finance for the project was raised by a loan from *Clarion* readers (in 'shares' of 10s - it would be paid off by 1904) guaranteed by *The Clarion*, overseen by an elected committee and secured against a life insurance policy on Lowerison.<sup>3</sup> Premises had been found at Hunstanton in Norfolk and the school was opened.

In February 1902 Ruskin School Home moved to new premises a few miles away at Heacham. Lowerison had involved the fellowship in the search for the new buildings and once these were secured he again asked them for donations. Though money might have been hard to get from his comrades, gifts were not. In one term, Spring 1903, Lowerison acknowledged gifts that included items such as: a painting, books, three display cabinets for the school museum, natural history specimens, bees, chickens and a pony. These were practical and offset expenditure but he welcomed them above all for "the spirit in which these have been given [which] helps us much in our up-hill fight."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the sources used in this presentation of Lowerison's work in Norfolk are taken from writings by him published after 1902. During the early years of the school's existence he was frantically busy and desperate to make ends meet. In *The Ruskin School Magazine* of Easter 1903 (The Lowerison Papers, E/HB2/848) he wrote that, "it is only now that I begin to feel that I can do my best work. The debt and minor harassing worries hitherto paralysed me." However, I have been assured by his daughter that in all its essentials the school operated on the same basis throughout its existence.

<sup>2</sup> *The Clarion*, 15 July, 7 Oct., and 18 Nov. 1899. These were the same principles that he had listed in an article, 'The New Code', under the pseudonym of 'The Dominie', in *The Clarion*, 13 April 1895. The similarity is so strikingly obvious (right down to the use of the quote from Ruskin - 'Justice and Gentleness' - which would become Ruskin School Home's motto) that there can be little doubt that Lowerison was this author.

<sup>3</sup> The loan, committee etc. are detailed in, *The Clarion*, 18 Nov. 1899, 13 Jan. 1900, and, 18 March 1904.

<sup>4</sup> *Ruskin School Home Magazine*, Easter 1903. The Lowerison Papers.

### **Pedagogic Principles**

The methods and syllabus used at Ruskin School Home were products of three of Lowerison's mainstream socialist beliefs. The first of these was that education should be de-institutionalised as part of the process of constructing a unified life that could be labelled fully social, and thus, that it should take place within a natural setting. This drive for unity of personality underlay the teaching of arts and crafts which were included to re-unite the elements of the human spirit, "the arts, sciences and labour", which had been dissipated by the capitalist system.<sup>1</sup> In this aspiration he was a close follower of William Morris. The second was that the correct way to instil a moral code was by example. Here one can find echoes of Carpenter, who had written that though factual knowledge could be taught directly,

a new ideal, a new sentiment of life can only pass by some direct influence from one to another. Yet it does pass, ... But if you have such an ideal within you, it is I believe your clearest duty, ... to act it out in your own life at all apparent costs.<sup>2</sup>

The third idea that underpinned the school was that children would best come to the truths of socialism if they were first presented with its ethical message (summarised in the school's motto of "Justice and Gentleness") along with the power of scientific rationalism which would lead them to accept the rightness of socialist conclusions as opposed to the irrationalities of religion. Indeed early advertisements for the school described it as being founded on "rationalist lines".<sup>3</sup>

William Morris drew a distinction that Lowerison would support when he thanked his own luck for having been "sent to a school where I was *taught* - nothing, but *learned* archaeology and romance on the Wiltshire downs."<sup>4</sup> In *News From Nowhere* Morris enunciated "the truest and rightest" ideals of education that Lowerison had encountered.<sup>5</sup> Here, education was totally de-institutionalised. The visitor to Utopia found a situation where children "learn to do things for themselves, and get to notice the wild creatures; and, you see, the less they stew inside houses the better for them."<sup>6</sup> This view

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lowerison, 'Ruskin School and Judge Parry on Education', *The Clarion*, 6 May 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Social Progress and Individual Effort*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the advert in, *The Clarion*, 26 May 1906.

<sup>4</sup> William Morris, 'Education Today', *News From Nowhere and selected writings and designs*, 147. Italics in original.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, 'Ruskin School Home - Easter Term 1906', *The Clarion*, 13 April 1906.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 205.

was shared by Margaret MacMillan who wrote that “formal teaching will never take the place of experience.”<sup>1</sup>

Bax wrote that “in the specialisation which characterises the learning of the nineteenth century the basal unity of knowledge is lost sight of, and each little grovelling specialist thinks that in his own science and its methods the fullness of knowledge is manifest.”<sup>2</sup> An author in *Seed-time* concurred with this analysis, and drew from it a lesson for the classroom. “This really sums up all that has to be said against the present-day idea of teaching; we must away with this teaching in parts and put before us once and for all the whole.”<sup>3</sup> Lowerison agreed wholeheartedly and sought to combat this drift to specialisation. His preferred method of teaching focused on creating a unified knowledge correlating, for example, astronomy with literature and art, since, “all things and sciences and men are one”<sup>4</sup> and then attempting to unite the children with this. This was to be achieved by finding one aspect of the knowledge that interested the children and then exploiting this as a gateway to the whole. Interest could be generated more easily by having them do things, or at least observe practical demonstrations of things. “Let education be primarily of things, not of words.”<sup>5</sup> Here again socialists stressed that the desire to do or to create was inherent. One author in the *Woolwich Labour Journal*, writing of his own son, stated that, “the distinctly human instinct is that of making things; ... to live in action and not merely to read and write about the actions of others is what our children must learn.”<sup>6</sup> The timetable at Ruskin School was structured so as to allow the children every afternoon free to go off cycling or walking in groups.

Lowerison had nothing against books. In fact he loved them and all they stood for<sup>7</sup>, and here he was probably overstating his case in order to highlight the drawbacks of existing education. Like Morris in *News From Nowhere*, he did not want to encourage bookishness too early and so he stressed doing over reading.<sup>8</sup> One of the drawbacks to book-based teaching was that “mere book and talk do not hold the attention of the children.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *The Ethical End in Education*, 101. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A2/2.

<sup>2</sup> E. B. Bax, Introduction to, *The Religion of Socialism*, pVI.

<sup>3</sup> Grace Heath, ‘The Function of a Teacher’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lowerison, *Star Lore for Teachers*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, *Sweet Briar Sprays*, 44.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Little Dick and the Education Problem’, *The Woolwich Labour Journal*, Nov. 1903.

<sup>7</sup> In fact Lowerison often wrote book reviews for *The Clarion*.

<sup>8</sup> William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 208.

<sup>9</sup> Lowerison, *Star Lore*, 12.

Moreover, and more fundamentally, just as Carpenter regarded knowledge gained from books as containing only “the phantoms of things,”<sup>1</sup> Lowerison held that “those who have no acquaintance with concrete things have no education at all!”<sup>2</sup> No education that is, in the 'real' sense of the word.

### **The Syllabus, 1: Fresh Air & Physical Education**

That the school was sited in the Norfolk countryside was no accident. A healthy mind in a healthy body required it and led to the common belief in the movement (see chapter one) that cities were inherently unhealthy places in which to rear children who, as more natural beings than adults, could best thrive in a more natural setting. An author in *Justice* once wrote that, “fresh air and beneficial exercise are ... indispensable to full bodily development, and this cannot be obtained in London or our large towns.”<sup>3</sup> Lowerison agreed, and like Quelch, he had campaigned for access to the countryside for ordinary people. He helped to set up and organise the Clarion Field Clubs. These had a vital role to play in the establishment of fellowship. They were to be the collective stewards of the people's heritage. As such they were instructed, in rules devised by Lowerison, in how to act to best secure the countryside for “those that come after.”<sup>4</sup> This was not an optional extra for the clubs. This was matter of “duty”.<sup>5</sup> Thus, he provided all new field clubs with a list of the addresses of other societies who could help to prevent “such unsocial acts”<sup>6</sup> as enclosing a common, blocking footpaths, defacing old building or shooting birds out of season.<sup>7</sup> After their marriage the Lowerisons moved to Epping where they would frequently host weekends for socialists who cycled out from the city, as Lowerison had done many times himself. He lectured to the Co-operative Holidays Association and when he left London to set up his school his original plan, to which he would return later, was to use the premises as a holiday home for the fellowship. Indeed the premises of his school would ultimately be sold to the Workers Holiday Association and when the school was open its advertisements in the socialist press usually mentioned the healthy environment.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter, ‘Desirable Mansions’, in, *England's Ideal*, 82.

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, ‘The Building of a House’, *The Clarion*, 21 July 1911.

<sup>3</sup> James Blackwell, ‘Children under Capitalism’, *Justice*, 26 March 1887.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, *Fields and Folklore*, 46-47.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *The Clarion*, 9 Feb. 1923.

As part of its drive to establish a new, non-supernatural basis for ethics, socialism sought to denigrate the Christian idea of the holiness of individual spiritual introspection and suffering, and to increase the importance of social virtues “in which the animal plays its part.”<sup>1</sup> “Hence”, Bax concluded, “the ethics of the future must inevitably involve a rehabilitation of the social VS the spurious abstract individual, and a rehabilitation of the animal as VS the spurious abstract spiritual.”<sup>2</sup> This philosophical desire to create whole, rounded individuals with both healthy minds and healthy bodies led to the movement placing very high emphasis on physical education. However, there was a difference within the movement as to the precise form of this exercise or physical education. Gould argued for the necessity of organised physical activities and against children being allowed to romp around. Lowerison however, believed that it was, whilst they were exercising or playing, (in his scheme there was often little difference between the two) that children were at their most natural and therefore, that this was his best opportunity to get to know them as individuals which was a prerequisite of developing their individuality.

A further difference within the movement was that over what form of physical education was to be organised, principally whether or not drill should be used. It is important to examine these differences since they allow access to debates within socialist education of the period which can illuminate socialist reasoning and because they shed light on some conclusions reached by other historians on these issues. Griggs has argued that “the labour movement favoured physical exercise but firmly rejected military drill.”<sup>3</sup> Another authority has shown how the T.U.C. led the way in campaigning against the use of military drill in schools.<sup>4</sup>

However, the picture is not as clear cut as this. In 1885 *The Labour Standard* carried an article that was wholly supportive of the War Office for supplying The Manchester School Board Cadet Force with 300 rifles.<sup>5</sup> The paper argued that the board was well-advised to make use of children’s propensity to play at soldiers to stimulate their participation in a programme

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<sup>1</sup> E.B. Bax, ‘The Futility of Holiness - a study in ethics’, in, Bax, *Essays in Socialism Old and New*, 30-31 & 33.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Clive Griggs, *The Trades Union Congress and the Struggle for Education 1868-1925*, 144.

<sup>4</sup> J.S. Hurt, ‘Drill, Discipline and the Elementary School Ethos’, in, P. McCann, ed., *Popular Education and Socialisation in the nineteenth century*, especially pages 176-187.

<sup>5</sup> Editorial in, *The Labour Standard*, 24 Jan. 1885.

of organised, and therefore more useful, physical education. *The Labour Standard* was not alone here. In 1897, the same year that drill competitions were abolished by the London School Board, the Secretary of the Liverpool Socialist Cinderella wrote to inform *The Clarion* that his group were thinking of starting drill at Cinderella events for the following year.<sup>1</sup> In so doing he may have been influenced by the example of the Salford Socialist Sunday School where the children, in addition to the usual story-telling and singing, practised musical drill. In his utopian work, Henry Lazarus assigned 33 hours out of a total of 598 class hours per term to military drill classes.<sup>2</sup> In 1896 Margaret MacMillan welcomed the changes made in the form of drill that she had witnessed since the 1870s but was still in favour of drill classes.<sup>3</sup> She argued that the precision and uniformity of movements showed the grace, beauty and natural elegance of children to their best advantage.

Conversely campaigning in the 1891 Oldham School Board Election J.E. Broadbent's handbills made his hostility to drill very clear.

Being opposed to any approach to the idea of 'Military Drill' I should advocate the erection of gymnasiums, in connection with the board schools, as a substitute for the 'Drill Masters' now employed by the board and believing that useful knowledge calculated to fit the rising generation for their future duties, is preferable to such 'Drill Instruction', I should advocate the appointing of a teacher of Chemistry, a teacher of Mechanics, who should visit the school, and give lessons on those lines periodically and regularly in place of the aforesaid 'Drill Instructors'.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Dan Irving castigated the ignorance of military drill instructors and the moral and physical harm their work caused children.<sup>5</sup> Like many socialists then, Broadbent and Irving were in favour of physical education but opposed to drill and, it seems, particularly hostile towards those who taught it, usually ex-army N.C.O.s. This hostility to militarism seems to have been taken for granted by historians who have overlooked the socialist arguments in favour of drill and it is thus this position which needs explanation.

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Dawson, 'The Cinderella Column', *The Clarion*, 13 Nov. 1897, 362.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Lazarus, *The English Revolution of the Twentieth Century*, 362.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret MacMillan, 'The Education of Children', *The Clarion*, 14 Nov. 1896.

<sup>4</sup> Handbill for Oldham School Board Election 1891. Coll. Misc. 375.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Irving, 'The Physical Basis of Education', *The Social Democrat*, 1900.



Socialists recognised the vital necessity of physical education but they also held to the article of faith that it was not simply the subjects taught but also the way that they were taught that influenced children. In their Sunday schools, as has been seen above, and in their educational packages, the dominant message put across by socialists was of the goodness of co-operation. Competition between children could be seen as the antithesis of this social spirit. This opposition often focused on the awarding of prizes which were seen as the apex of the system of inter-child competitiveness. Prizes were “like a worm” preying upon “the roots of Socialistic effort” and strengthening “the anti-social principles of rivalry.”<sup>1</sup>

This could easily put socialists in a position of hostility towards competitive sports which could be seen as a microcosm of the competitive system against which they fought.<sup>2</sup> Gould voiced strong opposition to competitive games.

But woe to us and our future if we can find no healthier use for that strength than in mere animal conflict and in the lust of victory over a fallen neighbour. We must be wanting in wit if we cannot discover in the world enough of ills, diseases, follies, and injustices to try our mettle on without encouraging needless contests of man with man.<sup>3</sup>

This position in turn left very little choice for physical education in a city school without access to a pool, gym or playing fields, than drill of some form or another. Thus where there was socialist opposition to drill it could be to the military form of some drill rather than to the practice of uniform and co-ordinated physical education as such<sup>4</sup> which could be preferred to competitive sports.

However, although competitive team games were just that, competitive, they could not be played without co-operation between members of the same team. Thus a socialist case could be made in defence of team sports and children could be encouraged to uphold, “the honour of their respective schools.”<sup>5</sup> This was certainly the view put forward by Gould in his

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<sup>1</sup> E. D. Girdlestone, ‘Education and Socialism’, *Seed-time*, April 1891. See also, Alice Woods, ‘Education in ‘Looking Backwards’’, *Seed-time*, April 1890.

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of the debates within socialism about sport, see, Stephen G. Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, especially 26-36. Though this work is not primarily concerned with children or with sports education.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in, David S. Nash, ‘F.J. Gould and the Leicester Secular Society: a positivist commonwealth in Edwardian Politics’, *Midland History*, 1991, 136.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, a cutting dated 28 June 1888 in the scrap books in The Passfield Papers, Section VIII B(i).

<sup>5</sup> Dan Irving, ‘The Physical Basis of Education’, *The Social Democrat*, 1900.

*Children's Moral Lessons*, and Arthur Fallows, secretary of the Birmingham Socialist Centre, agreed that games could heighten fellow-feeling and suppress egoism and gave this as the reason why they should have pride of place in an ideal curriculum.<sup>1</sup> In his work *Practicable Socialism*, Adam Birkmyre wrote that "in the rivalry of games, [or] ... for class prizes, and in the hourly association with each other here was a general feeling of good-fellowship. Distinction was not grudged. A clever scholar was felt to shed a lustre on the school."<sup>2</sup>

Lowerison was very keen on physical exercise for the children but was eclectic in his adoption of methods. He supported competition in the London Schools' Swimming Association.<sup>3</sup> Children at Ruskin School Home played competitive sports such as football and cricket (being taught the latter by Robert Blatchford after he moved into a cottage adjacent to the school).<sup>4</sup> He also allowed the children to take physical exercise in a non-competitive manner and encouraged them to cycle and walk round the countryside on their own. Swimming at the school was also conducted more for enjoyment and exercise than competition.

The differences of opinion over the form of physical exercise should not be ignored but equally they need to be kept in perspective. Though they were very different syllabuses they began from the same basic premise, namely the unity of ends and means. Co-operation between children ought to be encouraged at school, not only in what was taught, but also in how it was taught because this, the argument ran, would lead to their becoming co-operative adults. A more telling division within socialist education programmes is that of the attitude taken to sex education.

### **The Syllabus, 2: Sex education and education for the sexes.**

The 1895 edition of *The Labour Annual* published a brief 'New Scheme of Education' by Elanor Keeling. As part of this programme she proposed simple and straightforward sex education.<sup>5</sup> From the outset Lowerison was determined to reunite children with each other, with knowledge and nature but also with themselves. Lowerison used the study of natural history as

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Fallows, *Moral Teaching in the Board Schools*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Birkmyre, *Practicable Socialism*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> See above, chapter two.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, 'Ruskin School Home', *The Clarion*, 31 July 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Elanor Keeling, 'A New Scheme of Education', *The Labour Annual 1895*, 145-6.

the way into teaching the children about their own sexuality. In his manifesto for Ruskin School Home he wrote that, “as a child nears the age of puberty, it should be taught the sacredness of sex.”<sup>1</sup> He lambasted ‘Mrs Grundy’, the archetypal prude, who, “is always shrieking, ‘this is impure. Look at it!’.”<sup>2</sup> This kind of prurience led to sex becoming the subject of the kind of vile innuendoes and ignorant misinformation that caused the “horrible tortures of puberty”<sup>3</sup> as he knew from first-hand experience at Wenlock Road.<sup>4</sup> He heartily endorsed frank books about sex that would help dispel these soul-destroying myths and distributed them amongst the children at the school.<sup>5</sup> He also allowed the pupils at Ruskin School to have boy or girl friends.<sup>6</sup> This was possible because the school was co-educational, a policy which, at least one other writer agreed was, “one of the greatest steps forward ever taken.”<sup>7</sup>

When it came to sex Carpenter wrote that schools shut “a trap door down on the whole matter. There is a hush; a grim silence. Legitimate curiosity soon becomes illegitimate of its kind; and a furtive desire creeps in where there was no desire before. The method of the gutter prevails.”<sup>8</sup> John Trevor had experienced this same sex ‘education’ in the boarding school that he attended. This consisted of listening to older boys boasting of their experiences. As he was kept in ignorance of the development of his own body and deprived of any useful information he fell into what he termed “habits ... which long after gave me infinite trouble.”<sup>9</sup> Though he certainly thought that this over-indulgent destructiveness could, in his own case, have been prevented by more sports and athletics he argued that ignorance was the basic cause so there was the inference that he would support Lowerison’s dissemination of knowledge on this subject. This is made all the more plausible by his later writings on the beauty of sex. “Through this human communion, carried confidently and magnanimously to its natural ends, we have the opportunity of rising to the highest consciousness of real Being, of finding ourselves in the very presence of God.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, ‘My Ideal School’, *The Clarion*, 13 May 1899.

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, ‘Living Pictures’, *The Clarion*, 12 Jan. 1912.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, ‘Richard Jeffries’, *The Clarion*, 30 May 1913.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, ‘Nunquam’s Ideas on Education’, *The Clarion*, 1 July 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, ‘Richard Jeffries’, *The Clarion*, 30 May 1913

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mrs Elaine Auger.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Woods, ‘Education in ‘Looking Backwards’’, *Seed-time*, April 1890.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Carpenter, ‘Affection in Education’, 489.

<sup>9</sup> John Trevor, *My Quest for God*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 48. Capitals used as in original.

Like Trevor and Lowerison, Hyndman saw nothing of God in sex as it was presented to, or discovered by most slum-dwelling children.<sup>1</sup> Thus when Whitehead proposed sex education for socialist Sunday schools he sought to remove, “the filthy associations of the streets.”<sup>2</sup> Gould, however recommended a very different course of action to this programme of sex education. In his 1909 work *On The Threshold of Sex* he preached the virtues of abstinence and chastity. He portrayed the young body as an object of purity and beauty and likened masturbation to an act of vandalism in an art gallery.<sup>3</sup> Teaching that sex outside marriage was wrong this work was full of historical examples of women who guarded their honour, whom he held up for praise, and of those who did not, whom he damned. To aid self-control he proposed the following regime: regular cold baths and dowsing the genitals with cold water, that children empty their bowels regularly to relieve pressure, lots of outdoor exercise and useful hobbies to fill up quiet moments. He cautioned children against lying in bed after waking, drinking alcohol, eating meat, sharing beds and allowing themselves to be touched.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst the differences within socialism over the best methods for physical education were about means, not ends, this difference, over sex education, was far more substantive and indicated a fundamental reticence on the part of some socialists, such as Robert Blatchford, to “meddle in the sex question”<sup>5</sup>. This was in some cases, based on an outright hostility towards the feminist agenda. For example in his *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, Whitehead suggested that a class for girls between the ages of 15 to 18 should teach that, “physically and mentally she is the weaker vessel.”<sup>6</sup> But even if there was an absence of such clearly stated hostility the view put forward by most socialists gave de-facto acceptance of the prevailing structural relationship between men and women. Morris’s view of the future in *News From Nowhere*, for example, was one where women were proud to occupy much the same social roles as in the late nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> H. M. Hyndman, ‘The English Workers as they are’, 130.

<sup>2</sup> Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, 23. See also, pages 18 & 20.

<sup>3</sup> F. J. Gould, *On the Threshold of Sex*, 42 & 43.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 46-48. In two later works, *A Parent’s Guide to the Sex Instruction of Children*, and, *Health and Honour*, (1916 & 1919 respectively) he was somewhat less prudish though he still maintained what he, on the cover of *Health and Honour*, termed the “reverence for the sex-function.”

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Commanding the Heart Edward Carpenter and Friends’, *History Today*, Sept. 1987, 45.

<sup>6</sup> George Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, 25.

century.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in his *Co-operative Commonwealth* Gronlund wrote that men and women will “*keep pace with each other, but - in accordance with the teaching of physiology - walk in different pathways.*”<sup>2</sup> Not all socialists were so sanguine about this. Reviewing *News From Nowhere* for *Seed-time* Percival Chubb voiced a restrained scepticism and wrote that whether women’s “present aptitude and affection for culinary affairs will survive must be a moot point.”<sup>3</sup> On this point other socialists proposed a rather different agenda to that of Blatchford, Morris, Gronlund and Birkmyre and voiced it more vociferously than Chubb.

Enid Stacey, writing after “two generation of struggle and protest,”<sup>4</sup> argued that the social roles of women were produced, not by their biology, but by social conditioning, foremost amongst which was the education they received. This education system produced men and women whose characters and emotions were “lopsided”.<sup>5</sup> If, she wrote, for the sake of argument, one admitted that women were more prone to emotional outbursts than men, then their education ought to be so designed to counter this tendency and to develop their powers of “judgement and reason”.<sup>6</sup> Similarly the education of boys was ‘lopsided’ lacking as it did any development of the “sentimental side.”<sup>7</sup> “Small wonder that a training which sets out with the intention of dwarfing the emotional faculties results frequently in men who are callously indifferent to any interest save their own.”<sup>8</sup> She argued that the extension of sports and physical education to girls had gone some way to breaking down the ignorance that maintained that girls were weaker vessels than boys (with a tendency to swoon and faint at the merest provocation) and that this weakness ought to be enhanced by their education. However, she clearly thought that there was a long way yet to go. She would probably have approved of Lowerison’s attitude towards sex education, and applauded his stance on the enfranchisement of women but she would have criticised as ‘lopsided’ his

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 233-236.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth in its outlines: an exposition of modern socialism*, 204. Italics in original.

<sup>3</sup> Percival Chubb, ‘Morris’s Dip into the Future’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1891.

<sup>4</sup> Enid Stacey, *Education: its meaning. A socialist point of view*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

school's policy of teaching technical or vocational subjects on the traditional gender-based lines of late-Victorian society.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Syllabus, 3: Academic Teaching**

Three subjects serve as the best examples of how Lowerison put his pedagogic ideas into practice. These are Astronomy, Natural History and History. Astronomy entered the curriculum at Ruskin School Home after a boy, Bruce Kingsley, asked Lowerison some questions about the stars that he was unable to answer, and he set out to find out for himself. It would have been undoubtedly easier to teach it from a book but Lowerison sent out an appeal to the fellowship, got a telescope in return (actually he got three) and set to work. He had always hated too rigid an adherence to timetables and the fact that so useful (to his mind) a subject had, of necessity, to be done at night confirmed this.<sup>2</sup> The children carried out their own observations, kept logs and gave each other lectures, making all their own illustrations and props including magic lantern slides. When it came to explaining the movements of celestial bodies, the phases of the moon, eclipses and other celestial phenomena Lowerison proved himself adept at the creation of all manner of contraptions involving balls, lengths of string, torches and hoops which were “absolutely necessary ... for little children to get clear ideas on this subject.”<sup>3</sup> Astronomy, therefore, was not just a hobby. It was a way into the world of science and hence into all knowledge as all knowledge was one.

One subject which socialists saw as being highly beneficial to children was Natural History. At the end of 1895 *The Labour Prophet* abandoned its ‘Cinderella Supplement’, which it had run from the middle of 1893, and substituted in its place a page of ‘Nature Notes for Young Naturalists’.<sup>4</sup> Written by Thomas Robinson of Swansea these pages gave a vivid and interesting account of pond life. This was not a metaphorical exercise from which socialist lessons were drawn it was undertaken simply to inform the young readership of the joys of natural history.

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<sup>1</sup> See below, chapter 4, for a fuller discussion of this topic.

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, *Star Lore*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 34.

<sup>4</sup> See, *The Labour Prophet* May 1893, for first, ‘Cinderella Supplement’, and November 1895 for the first, ‘Nature Notes for Young Naturalists’.

The importance of natural history was rooted in the belief that children were more natural than adults and this was symbolised by what was seen as an inherent desire on the part of children to get close to nature. *The Woolwich Labour Journal* maintained that, “every child is a born naturalist”<sup>1</sup> who would, given half a chance, wander through fields, go fishing, gather frog spawn, pick flowers or collect birds’ eggs. Taught properly this was a very practical and hands on subject and was thus in tune with “the natural child, his natural ways, his natural mode of development.”<sup>2</sup> Carpenter expressed this in his poem *Towards Democracy*, Between a great people and the earth springs a passionate attachment, lifelong-  
and the earth loves indeed her children, broad breasted, broad browed, and talks  
with them night and day, storm and sunshine, summer and winter alike  
[Here indeed is the key to the whole secret of education]<sup>3</sup>

There was no more important subject in Lowerison’s curriculum than Natural History. The children were allowed to keep animals so long as they looked after them properly. They kept nature diaries and collected the fossils and pre-historic flint implements that littered the Norfolk landscape. Two of these finds were donated to the British Museum and others were put on display in the school’s own museum. Like Gould, Lowerison used these to teach history and to draw from the lessons an element of a morality that transcended time. This is best illustrated by his book of short stories for children, *From Paleolith to Motor Car-Heacham Tales*, which was recommended by Whitehead for use in socialist Sunday schools.<sup>4</sup>

Margaret MacMillan, like most of her comrades, despaired of the book-based rote learning system. Knowledge crammed in this way “is very well, but it has no roots.”<sup>5</sup> By this she meant that the child had no personal contact with the past and therefore no emotional interest in the subject. She contrasted this with history learned at the knee of one’s grandfather, or the oral history learned from bards in ancient times. Her modern equivalent of this was a child who found an artefact, a battered belt buckle or a pottery fragment. “Now he desires to hear the story ... and then to read about it in

<sup>1</sup> ‘A Glance at the Educational Problem’, *The Borough of Woolwich Labour Journal*, Dec. 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> George Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *The Ethical End in Education*, 97. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A2/2.

the history books.”<sup>1</sup> This was precisely what Lowerison sought to accomplish in this book.

*From Paleolith to Motor Car* contained fourteen stories, each set in a different epoch stretching from the Old Stone Age to late-Victorian times. Each story took as its starting point something that the children had found such as a flint axe head, an old coin or a button, or some familiar local landmark or building. Like Gould’s moral lessons, these short stories linked the material wealth of the individual to his moral positioning. The tales were not simply abstracted ethicalism, for when they drew moral lessons it was about serious political points. The political points developed by the stories were similar to those laid out by Gould. Principally the book advanced the need to struggle to preserve and develop freedom. It praised the intrinsic worth of the community as opposed to selfish individualism, and condemned the moral degradation of those who lived without working for the community. The evils of private property were also commented upon. For example, in ‘Aelfus the Mason’, set in the reign of King Stephen, the hero was a gifted craftsman who was dragooned by the local Norman noble to use his skills in the construction of Castle Rising. He was murdered for his subsequent passive resistance to this tyranny. However, in the following chapter, set in the reign of King John, the locals of the village of Heacham who had worked together to build their own church were able, through their unity, to see off the King’s troops. The people who united in the Guilds to defend their rights from yet another royalist onslaught, in the story ‘Hunstanton Cross’, did so “for the children, and their children” in the belief that “things will never go well in England so long as goods be not in common, and so long as there be villeins and gentlemen.”<sup>2</sup> In one of the earlier stories, ‘Inito’s Axe’, the eponymous Neolithic hero was requested by his dying father, the chief of the tribe, to rule with ‘justice and gentleness’. This was the motto of Ruskin School Home.

## **Conclusion**

It has been forcibly argued over many years that the socialism of this period was ‘ethical’ in that it proposed a change in people’s characters as the panacea for social ills. It is definitely true that socialist educational practice

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Harry Lowerison, *Paleolith to Motor Car*, 135 & 137.



in these decades sought to create whole, well-rounded individuals, rational and thoughtful men and women who were freed from the alienations that characterised capitalist society. Socialism argued that the collapse of this system which alienated and, separated people from themselves, each other, nature and knowledge could not wait until after some material transformation of the ordering of society had been effected. This does not mean that moral improvements were to prefigure the material. The alliance of ends and means dictated that they must occur simultaneously with the material change. Given the strongly-rooted socialist belief in the ethical purity of children one might expect that, if an 'ethical' socialism was to be found, it would be in the educational presentations made to youngsters. But this is absent from these packages. There is little to be found here that will prop up any theory that postulates a 'universalist' appeal from socialist ranks. This chapter has omitted one crucial area of the socialist educational presentation, that of technical education. This was such an important topic that it deserves a separate chapter.

# CHAPTER 4

## Socialism, work and technical education

If the children are to be free to go to school and the old people and the sick to rest:

- 1)) **All the strong people must be willing to work;**
- 2) **All the work that is done must be useful work, and ,**
- 3) **The workers must help one another.**

Katherine Bruce Glasier, *Socialism for Children*, 8.

In October 1901 the event of the month for all working men in Liverpool was, according to *The Labour Chronicle*, the formal opening of the new technical school on Byrom Street in the city. The paper gave over most of its issue for the month to a lavish description of the premises. The readership was informed, in the awed and reverential tones that one might normally associate with a guide book to a royal palace, of the high quality of the materials used in its construction (marble from Ashford, Derbyshire and Cork) and the opulence of its decoration (alabaster statues, red marble fireplaces, painted panels, bronze electric lamps and wrought iron gates) all of which were made and installed by recognised craftsmen.<sup>1</sup> This incident was not unique. Ten years earlier, for example, *The Democrat* had taken time out from its praise of Stewart Headlam's work on the London School Board to comment on the "handsome and commodious hall" of the board school where Headlam's meeting was held.<sup>2</sup> Though such favourable descriptions of public buildings were thus not uncommon, they were not bestowed indiscriminately. The level of luxury described would doubtless have been excoriated had it been designed for the use of the middle classes. With this in mind the fact that it was so welcomed in these buildings clearly merits closer investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Event of the Month', *The Labour Chronicle*, Oct. 1901.

<sup>2</sup> 'Stewart Headlam at the School Board', *The Democrat*, 1 Jan. 1890.

Morris and Lowerison both wrote that the life and soul of a nation was reflected in its art and that the art form which most clearly embodied this reflection was architecture.<sup>1</sup> Writing about civic buildings in general, the Woolwich *Labour Journal* developed this theme. “If a great building is to be beautiful when it is built ... it must be the embodiment of a human spirit” which was shared by the community of those who paid for it, designed it, and built it. The paper went to argue that the most beautiful buildings in the world were those that represented the fierce defence of freedom and citizenship from the attacks of overweening tyranny.<sup>2</sup> As Lowerison put it these were “the edifices on which the lamps of truth and beauty and power shine.”<sup>3</sup> The importance of the technical school in Byrom Street must be seen, within this framework, as largely symbolic and founded in the fact that it was formal recognition of the value of working people to the community. Just as the cathedrals and piazzas of renaissance cities were built by free workers to embody the liberty and freedom of expression<sup>4</sup> in work that was defended from their city walls by themselves as the armed citizenry, so Byrom Street School was to Liverpool’s socialists a civil monument to the workers. It marked their arrival on the modern urban landscape and so presaged their social and political ascendancy by recognising the value of work as such.

Socialists placed the struggle for the recognition of the value of work high on their list of priorities for, as Margaret Macmillan put it, “everyone who works gives his life - nothing less. The man or woman who works cannot give less than energy, time, LIFE.”<sup>5</sup> However, this is something that has not always received the attention which it merits from historians. For example in his survey *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, Chris Waters has concluded that only a “few socialists were able to envisage a reorganised work process.”<sup>6</sup> He has argued that visions of a reformed work were left to the writers of socialist utopias, such as Morris, who were, by implication, outside the mainstream of socialist opinion. The focus of socialist thinking on work was, he has argued, with these few exceptions, limited to either attempts to shorten the hours spent at work, or

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<sup>1</sup> Lowerison, *Mother Earth*, 104. And, William Morris, *The Revival of Architecture*, 669.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Town Hall and the People’, *The Labour Journal*, Dec. 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, *Mother Earth*, 104.

<sup>4</sup> William Morris, *The Revival of Architecture*, 669.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret MacMillan, ‘She Who Must be Obeyed’, *The Workman’s Times*, 5 May 1894. Capitals in original. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, 4/2.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Waters, *British Socialism and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 54.

to provide opportunities to punctuate these working periods with healthy recreation. In neither case, Waters has argued, were socialists able to carve out an independent vision since any of these proposals “could have been found in many liberal periodicals.”<sup>1</sup> The implication of this lack of clarity on such a central question is that work was deemed, by the majority of the movement, to be simply irretrievably arduous toil.

There are several points that need to be made in response to this argument. Firstly, the fact that British capitalism has been able to grant an eight hour day and yet remain in all essentials intact, must not detract from the fact that it was utterly unwilling and unable to accommodate such demands in the 1880s and 1890s. Just as the socialist demand for state maintenance for school children would, had it been carried, have been powerfully transformative in this period, so too would the eight hour day. This was precisely why socialists advocated it and it further explains the intransigence of capitalist opposition to the shorter working day. This latter attitude was made manifest in the nation-wide lock-out launched by the Engineering Employers' Federation in July 1897.

Secondly, it is unhelpful to argue that because socialists debated points with liberals that their programmes were indistinguishable. Socialists sought to empower the working class through agitation such as that for a shorter working day. It was thus not the end of struggle but rather one of the means of struggle. Moreover, the difference between liberals and socialists was not simply concerned with the long-term strategic drift of events and actions, for there were considerable differences between their political programmes as applied to the reforms they sought. One aim of this chapter is to highlight how socialists argued in favour of technical education from a perspective that was markedly different from those of their contemporaries. This, was made very clear by socialist hostility towards the provision of commercial education. It is also hoped that this chapter will draw out more clearly the socialist view of the nature of work, its essential social function and its debasement under capitalism and it is to these more general propositions that attention must first be turned.

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

## **Socialism and work**

Recognition of the social value of work, and of those who worked in society, was a powerful novelty in this period and was not granted lightly but rather was fought for. Equally novel was a recognition that unemployment existed as a structural problem in its own right and that it was not an issue of the moral short-comings of sections of the working population.<sup>1</sup> In struggling for such recognition of the value of work socialists were attempting to redefine the idea of citizenship. This new definition sought to elevate the performance of work to the level of a crucial criterion of membership of the democratic polity. If the citizen was to make claims on the state these could only be justified by the performance of a set of reciprocal duties that defined membership. These included participation in civic affairs, and also, as Ben Tillet told the readers of his *Trades Unionism and Socialism*, the performance of work. “The idlers and wasters of Rotten Row must be replaced by living, useful men and women, rendering service as justification of their existence and membership of a great nation.”<sup>2</sup>

The reciprocity between the community and the individual, the unity of the self and the group was nowhere made plainer than here. The work performed was to be both useful for the collectivity, and rewarding for the performer, the two sets of benefits being fundamentally and inextricably intertwined. Citizens would be obliged to work but this duty would not be a heavy burden but rather a pleasure as this work, Daniel McCulloch, wrote in *The Commonweal*, could be, “the outward and palpable revelation of the inward ... a source of genuine profit and pleasure to yourself and others.”<sup>3</sup> Carpenter developed this theme, at length, in his lecture on *The Future State*. He told his audience that the removal of the fear and anxiety that were bred by the commercialism which characterised the society of the 1890s would free people to take up work according to their own taste and skill. All would understand, and the children would be taught that, this freedom was contingent upon each contributing something. This would however not be problematic as the new system would produce a “quite

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this new approach see, James H. Treble, *Urban Poverty in Britain 1830-1914*. Especially, 51-55.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Tillet, *Socialism and Trades Unionism*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Education: What it is and what it should be’, *The Commonweal*, 19 Jan. 1889. And, Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England*, 45.

different spirit” in society wherein such true social behaviour was the norm.<sup>1</sup>

Though the socialist discourse of the period fused them there were three strands to this strategic vision of work that can be separated out for examination. The first of these was a twofold critique of the existing society which condoned idleness by the “wasters of Rotten Row” whilst simultaneously failing to reward the producers of society’s wealth.

Like many other socialists, the Fabian Society in Worcester, found that its ideas were often misrepresented by its political opponents especially by the various local religious denominations. Thus, prior to a lecture to be delivered by an invited speaker of national renown, Hubert Bland, the group took the struggle to its opponents by sending them a challenge to a public debate. This took the form of a questionnaire (a popular format with the Fabians<sup>2</sup>) question number four of which encapsulated this first strand of the socialist position on work. It read, “is it right that the idle should be honoured and respected in the Church, whilst the honest and industrious are offered a backseat?”<sup>3</sup> Not only were these rich ‘idle’ they were also, as Carpenter put it, “corrupt, shrivelled and diseased” as a result of the “jungle of idiotic duties and thin-lipped respectabilities that money breeds.”<sup>4</sup> In re-constituting their class the rich sought to remove themselves yet further from the world of work and those who performed it. They established an education system that taught their children how to “spell ‘spade’, to write it, to rhyme it, to translate it into French and Latin - possibly, like Wordsworth, to address a sonnet to it”<sup>5</sup> anything in fact but how to use it. This had the dual effect of, simultaneously, bolstering their sense of self-worth and socially degrading yet further the working class. *The Workers’ Herald* appointed The Prince of Wales, ‘Idler in Chief’ at the top of the pyramid of parasites. The paper wrote that it was ‘the done thing’ to comment upon how hard the heir to the throne worked and how his health was even endangered by the onerous round of official duties which he performed. However, in reality when his Royal Highness’s published diaries were scrutinised by the paper’s writers they found him to be “the

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Future State* - notes for a lecture. Feb. 1890. The Carpenter Collection, Mss no. 48.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the Society’s, *Questions for School Board Candidates*.

<sup>3</sup> Worcester Fabian Society, 21 Feb. 1894. Coll Misc 375.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, ‘Desirable Mansions’, in, *England’s Ideal*, 85 & 89.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 81 & 85.

supreme Public diner, Dancer, Theatre Goer, and Turf Patron; a sublime ornament got up at the national expense for the benefit of a few select country houses and London drawing rooms.”<sup>1</sup>

At the root of this system, which exalted the mastery of “dead vocables” and “a delicate courtesy”<sup>2</sup> over the moral and material uplifting of society, was the anti-social institution of private property which divorced the rich from the essential act of creation and alienated the worker from the product of his labour. The ennui of the middle classes, deprived of real work, was thus crucially dependent upon the dulling slavery of the working class at work.<sup>3</sup>

Though both groups may have been systematically deprived of the spiritual rewards of labour, when it came to sharing the fruits of labour deprivation was a very one-sided affair. This disproportionate distribution was highlighted by Leonnard Hall who wrote that, “in England some 15,000 of our total 39,000,000 people hold 50,000,000 out of our total 72,000,000 acres.”<sup>4</sup> The socialist argument was not only about the economic inequity of these figures. Its focus was more often designed to establish a heightened sense of self-worth in the workers, both through their contribution to society and through the social processes of work itself. This analysis thus created a twofold juxtaposition, firstly of the socially necessary products of manual labour and the uselessness of the lives of the idle rich, and secondly, of the collective nature of work and the stunted individualism of the middle classes. This collective action in work and the collective identity produced through it could lead to the production of new forms of cultural expression which, though engendered in the factory, could spill out of its gates to colour the cultural life of the wider community.<sup>5</sup> Aspects of this workplace culture could be under the aegis of the employer, perhaps in the form of ‘treats’ or outings, but other facets could draw out the collectivity of the workers in a way that specifically excluded the employer. The spirit of this exclusivity was captured by Joseph Clayton in his poem *In a London Gasworks*.

After all the common labour, the common bondage here,  
draws us together.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Prince of Wales day by day’, *The Worker’s Herald: A Socialist Weekly*, Jan. 1892.

<sup>2</sup> Persona, ‘Culture and Progress’, *The Labour Journal*, Sept. 1902.

<sup>3</sup> William Morris, *The Art of the People*, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Leonnard Hall, *Land, Labour and Liberty: The ABC of Reform*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph owes much to the work of Patrick Joyce. See, *Visions of The People*, especially 131.

The comradeship, the fellowship of labour stands immortal.  
And for us too, in the gasworks, there is a triumph - you  
respectable - philosophic learned people cannot do our  
work. To look at it makes you shrink - you and your good  
manners shrivel up at the heat - you are best away when  
there is work to be done.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly Lowerison wrote that whilst agricultural workers could work in fields at hay-making time “hyper-sensitive and overstrung people” fell victims to hay fever and “your upper-class lady of unhealthy life has to fly to her yacht after passing a hayfield.”<sup>2</sup> In one of her short melodramas Margaret Macmillan juxtaposed Sarah, a strong healthy serving girl, with Mrs Merriver, her physically degenerate and overbearing employer. Despite obviously loathing this old hag Sarah was decent enough to save her from a flood even though the effort cost her own life.<sup>3</sup> These shrivelling idlers might have had status and learning on their side but the workers were not only more productive, and thus socially useful, they also had the sole legitimate claim to the moral high ground.

There is, throughout this analysis a self-evident pride which was used against the idle classes and the type of education system that produced such plainly enfeebled specimens, and this was used to advance the cause of the working class. One of the main vehicles of this advance was technical education. Fred Brocklehurst saw technical education as one of the key ways to overcome what he called “namby-pambyism”<sup>4</sup> or what Lowerison, Morris and *The Labour Leader* all termed “the evils of mere bookishness”.<sup>5</sup> It would be easy to see this as simple ‘ouvrieristic’ anti-intellectualism but such a view would be mistaken. It would, firstly, ignore the often highly sophisticated content of the proposed technical education. Secondly, it would also ignore the context of such attacks on ‘bookishness’. Socialists like Lowerison had nothing at all against books. Lowerison was in fact one of *The Clarion*’s main book reviewers and the children at Ruskin School

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Clayton, ‘In a London Gasworks’, in, *Before Sunrise & other poems*. In his novel, *The Under-Man*, Clayton described the same work as, “necessary, it was honest; all said and done; it was more necessary and more honest than work done in many a city office.” (page 54)

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, *Mother Earth*, 65.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret MacMillan, ‘The Mistress and The Maid’, undated cutting from *The Clarion*. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, 4/4.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘Education Reform’, *The Labour Leader*, 29 Sept. 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, *Star-Lore*, 12. William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 208. ‘The London School Board Election’, *The Labour Leader*, 17 July 1897.



Home wrote book reviews for *The Clarion*.<sup>1</sup> Neither books nor an intellectual approach to education were being attacked as such. Rather what was being attacked was a two-tier education system that operated as an intricate part of a social system that condemned those who produced the wealth of the country to a life of, at best, second-class citizenship. In a lecture on *The Teaching of Citizenship* Carpenter said that he had nothing against “brain work” but rather he was pains to point out that any kind of work, be it either brain work or hand work, if performed in isolation from the other “may be only powers of evil”.<sup>2</sup> McCulloch similarly argued for the combination of intellectual development and work, or industrial training, to provide an education that combined the material and the moral. He was aware that such a programme might be seen as levelling down the population and so retarding the emergence of genius which the current system had produced. He countered this argument by pointing out that true poets would always emerge as their work was inside them and that, moreover, this line of criticism was inhumane and undemocratic, “no human is born with brains so meagre as to warrant the enormous cruelty perpetrated by society in confining a man to the solitary occupation of boring like a rat in mines from the moment they are able to work till the day they die.”<sup>3</sup>

In order to change this system the role of work had to be elevated and this involved an attack on a culture that valued those who did not work but who surrounded themselves with all the arcane mystique of learning. *The Labour Leader* launched one of its sarcastic exercises in debunking this myth thus:

If a man wants to become a plumber he has to serve seven years’ apprenticeship to the trade - and it is the same with other handicrafts. If a man wants to become a parson, a doctor, a politician, or a barrister, he goes to the university for three or four years - only a year in this case means at most six or seven months. Going to the university to learn a profession is thus similar to being apprenticed to a trade. But because a profession is a higher and more difficult thing to learn than a trade, one takes a shorter time and easier method of learning it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Clarion*, 6 Dec. 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Teaching of Citizenship*, notes for a lecture, Nov. 1893. The Carpenter Collection, Mss 102-2.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel McCulloch, ‘Education: What it is and what it should be’, *The Commonweal*, 19 Jan. 1889.

<sup>4</sup> ‘What they do at Universities’, *The Labour Leader*, 23 March 1896.

In a similar vein, and for the same purpose, Blatchford concluded that, “in our eyes the skilled craftsman or farmer is a man of learning, and the Greek-crammed pedant is a dunce.”<sup>1</sup> As part of their critique socialists thus attacked the usefulness and validity of prevalent definitions of both culture and learning. “It is the cant of today that ... the youth in search of culture must indeed have his three years or more at Oxford or Cambridge. Cant, pure Cant.”<sup>2</sup> These ivory towers gave their graduates only the skimmings from the surface of a true culture, the author continued, and the deeper body of this culture lay in the “heart of the common people.” This was the sole basis of all culture and moreover the only starting point for any meaningful social progress.

The second strand of the socialist analysis saw work as an essentially creative act, vital not only to the social place of an individual, but also to his personal self-esteem. Carpenter reckoned that three quarters of the population might say that they would love to give up work, but he thought that after a few months of “twiddling their thumbs” they would be keen to use their hands to do something.<sup>3</sup> Tom Mann was no idle thumb-twiddler by nature but he clearly felt the need to work rather than simply to agitate full-time. At the end of 1887 he wrote to John Burns to tell him that he (Mann) had taken a job with the North Eastern Marine Engineering Co. at Wallsend. He thought that Burns would be surprised to receive this news and so explained himself. Turning out early to tackle the ordinary routine of workshop life, he wrote, provided him with, “some satisfaction”.<sup>4</sup> Work was described by Glasier, in an article for *The Young Socialist*, as a “magic power”.<sup>5</sup> *Justice* described the performance of “true work” as a “necessary social duty, its rewards are the treasures of life”.<sup>6</sup> This “true” work was praised by Carpenter who argued that,

every man who has done honest work knows that such work is a pleasure - one of the greatest pleasures in life ... to use your skill and your strength in producing that which is beneficial to yourself and others, to look back afterwards on the work of your hands, to see that as far as may be it has been well done, that it will serve its time and intended

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Blatchford, *The New Religion*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Culture and Progress’, *The Labour Journal* (Woolwich), Sept. 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Future State*, notes for a lecture. Feb. 1890. The Carpenter Collection, Mss no. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Mann letter to J. Burns, 31 Dec. 1887. British Library Add Manu, 46285 f1.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bruce Glasier, ‘How Fairy Stories are True’, *The Young Socialist*, April 1902.

<sup>6</sup> William Diack, ‘Democracy’, *Justice*, 16 Sept. 1893.

purpose - these things in themselves cannot but be a pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

This work would thus re-socialise the individual, linking him to the collectivity by giving him work that was rewarding and which was recognised as such. This recognition coming in part in the allocation of the humane working conditions for which Mann and his fellow socialist trade unionists fought. Katherine Bruce Glasier's book *Socialism for Children* made plain her belief that good workers could not exist en masse unless they were also well-treated workers.<sup>2</sup>

This linkage of the individual and society through work was also obvious in Lowerison's stories for children which often featured skilled workers from history who performed work that they enjoyed all the more because it was carried out for the benefit of a community of which they felt themselves to be an organic part.<sup>3</sup> This unity of the individual and the community through the duties or rights associated with work was a recurrent theme in all his work. When writing about old churches, for example, he asked why they were so beautiful and came up with the answer that they were so because the, "builders worked only an eight hour day", which is to say that they were respected and not exploited by their community or, because they believed in what they were doing which was made all the more likely when they were working for a community that, in turn, worked for them. It would be easy to write this off as the pursuit of a 'golden age'. However, it must be borne in mind that Lowerison was a teacher and that through these references to a possibly better age he was drawing a didactic comparison to show that the world need not always be as it was. In fact the majority of such references, usually to 'Merrie England', were used to draw a clearly expressed contemporary message. In his writings about old churches the important point was that they were juxtaposed to the "excrescences" built in his own time, by sweated and alienated labour, "which for hardness and bareness and ugliness had never had an equal in all the history of human house building."<sup>4</sup> As Tom Mann put it in his pamphlet, *The Eight Hour Day*, "I refuse to accept the superficial answer that a man is an admirer of the good old times because he insists that the failures of civilisation should be examined along with ... its vaunts."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Co-operative Production*, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Bruce Glasier, *Socialism for Children*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the stories in, *From Paleolith to Motor Car - Heacham Tales*.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, *Sweet Briar Sprays*, 90.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Mann, 'The Eight Hour Day', in, John Laurent, ed., *Tom Mann Social and Economic Writings*, 2.

There was an obvious similarity here between Lowerison and the remarks from the Woolwich *Labour Journal* quoted at the start of this chapter. Both Lowerison and the Woolwich I.L.P. held firmly to the ideas that work could and should be personally, even spiritually, rewarding and also beneficial to the community. When these were linked together, as they were by ordinary socialists, they formed not only an attractive alternative vision but also a powerful critique which would seem to have been far more popular and widespread than Waters suggests.

This alternative view of work marked out very significant points of departure from the prevailing orthodoxies, and socialists were aware of the transformative nature of what they demanded. Morris is worth quoting at length on this point,

It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do which they are, each of them, especially fitted to do; that this work should be worth doing, pleasant to do of itself, and should be done under such conditions as should not make it burdensome or over-anxious work.

Yet modest as the claim is, the granting of it in practice would entirely change the condition of life in modern civilisation, for, in the first place work cannot be pleasant to do unless full self-respect go with it; and no self-respect can go with it unless the worker feels while he is at work that he is doing something worth doing, adding to the wealth of the world.

That one little sentence ‘doing something worth doing’ implies a revolution in the life of all classes in civilised society to begin with. It strikes at the root of luxury as we now understand the term.<sup>1</sup>

This “implied revolution” was clearly understood by the book’s readers. When Percival Chubb reviewed it in *Seed-time* he wrote that “on the whole Morris’s doctrine of work is perhaps the most revolutionary and far-reaching idea in the book.”<sup>2</sup>

Elements of really social work could occasionally be perceived, as they were by Clayton, in even the performance of work under the status quo. However, more often than not, they were absent because of the prevailing system within which work was performed. A clear idea of the forces that debased people’s social creativity was the third strand of the socialist

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, *The Art of the People*, 99.

<sup>2</sup> Percival Chubb, ‘Morris’s dip into the future’, *Seed-time*, Oct. 1891.

analysis of work and it is worth noting that this analysis was applied to agricultural and urban work alike. It is necessary here to take some space over this point since David Howell has presented socialist views on rural life as being premised upon the belief in a “rural arcadia”, a “Golden Age”, the “idyll of rural life ... a naive view of rural life ... the rural dream ... a beguiling utopia”, which “as a guide to action ... offered little.”<sup>1</sup> In the previous chapter it was shown how socialists often presented their educational packages in the forms of history lessons in which better times were illustrated. This did not betoken a belief in the existence of a lost arcadia. These were didactic points drawn to show, as Carpenter put in one of his lectures, that though the existing system may have seemed natural, it had not always existed. The point here being that with effort, it need not always exist either. He maintained that the programme of the future was clear enough: mankind could not turn back the clock but it had to get out of its current turmoil.<sup>2</sup>

Socialists often expressed this preference for the fresh air of the countryside, but this did not mean that agricultural work was necessarily seen as idyllic. Lowerison loved the countryside and fought for access to it, but he was also painfully aware of the harshness of a rural worker's life. As a student at Saint Hild's teacher training college he had worked on the land in his holidays. This had left him with few illusions about the nature of agricultural work. “You have seen a hayfield from the idyllic side hitherto perhaps. Try it at half-a-crown a day.” He was lucky and he knew it. His had been a temporary exposure to such back-breaking toil, “but how of the girls who worked with me and who still work at it?”<sup>3</sup> One of his trips round the country took him into Kent where he found hop pickers, “men and women and children sitting half-naked at the doors of their sodden tents, while they tried to dry soaked underclothing at feeble fires of wet wood that hissed and sputtered in the driving rain.”<sup>4</sup> To him this was not productive labour and neither did it show a harmony between man and nature. It was a denial of the means necessary even for basic survival and it was intolerable.

In his *Thoughts on The Countryside* Morris wrote of how agricultural work crippled and disfigured people and, “knocked them out of the shape of a

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<sup>1</sup> David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906*, 354-355.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Breakdown of our Industrial System*, Notes for a lecture, 1 -3. The Carpenter Collection Mss, 258.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, *Mother Earth*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Lowerison, *In England Now*, 152.

man". What was needed to remedy this situation was plain to him, a new battle against "*capitalist* robbers"<sup>1</sup> to gain for the people the communal ownership of the land to be worked in common by the people. Rather than just dream of rural utopias socialists actually sought to agitate amongst agricultural workers<sup>2</sup> though this was difficult given their urban base. However, from these towns, socialists sought to get the workers out into the countryside, a process that could itself raise serious issues of political struggle as Lowerison well knew.

He railed against the retired Birmingham manufacturers who charged an entrance fee for admission to their estates. "They make the town a hell of squalor for their 'hands' to dwell in, and then make them pay for the privilege of escaping for one day in the week from its smoke and foulness."<sup>3</sup> These landowners were following in the tradition of the aristocrats who had enclosed the commons.<sup>4</sup> However, there was another tradition, which was one of resistance to such enclosure. Lowerison, characteristically, found an example on his doorstep. This was the case of one Willingale, an ordinary workingman from Loughton, who, in the 1870s, persisted in exercising his rights to collect fuel from Epping Forest. He was prosecuted by those who would have continued to enclose the forest but the case took so long to resolve that it blocked the process of enclosure and the forest was saved.<sup>5</sup> Rather than a naive view of rural life and work it would thus appear that there was pattern of socialist appreciation of the hardships of agricultural work and an understanding of the political and social realities of life in the countryside.

On the back of its flyers the Socialist League in Bradford quoted William Morris's savaging of the often minute division of labour that characterised so many capitalist operations, "for a man to be the whole of his life hopelessly engaged in performing one repulsive and never ending task, is an arrangement fit enough for the hell imagined by theologians, but scarcely fit for any other form of society."<sup>6</sup> Machines were used by this system to debase work and de-skill or dispense with working people.

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, *Under an Elm Tree, or, Thoughts on the Countryside*, 16. Italics in original.

<sup>2</sup> See, *The Hammersmith Socialist Record*, Jan. 1892.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, *In England Now*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 182.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Lowerison, *Sweet Briar Sprays*, 76-78. And, Lowerison, *Mother Earth*, 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Socialist League handbill, Bradford 1885. The Pickles Collection, PIC/57-8.

Machinery was not deployed to save labour but to save wages.<sup>1</sup> It was not argued that machines as such were bad. Rather what was seen was that the social place of the machine needed urgent redefinition as part of the general reformation of society.<sup>2</sup> It was not, therefore, simply machines which caused the problems of de-skilling and unemployment but rather their use within a capitalist economic system.

The validity of such an analysis was seen in cases where the worker worked without machines but was still debased. The decorators portrayed by Robert Tressell were ostensibly skilled craftsmen but

extraordinary as it may appear, none of them took any pride in their work: they did not 'love' it. ... On the contrary, when the workers arrived in the morning they wished it was breakfast time. When they resumed work after breakfast they wished it was dinner-time. After dinner they wished it was one o'clock on Saturday.<sup>3</sup>

Given the system within which they worked there was nothing really 'extraordinary' about their lack of commitment to, or pride in, their own work. As Carpenter remarked, "no man can enjoy doing bad work."<sup>4</sup> But rather than being censured for turning out such soul-destroying shoddiness this was tacitly condoned, if not indeed actually demanded, by the system. Tressell made the point thus,

it would not be reasonable to blame Misery or Rushton [respectively the gaffer and the employer of the decorators] for not wishing to do good, honest work - there was no incentive. When they secured a contract, if they had thought first of making the very best possible job of it, they would not have made so much profit. The incentive was not to do the work as well as possible but to do as little as possible. The incentive was not to make good work, but to make a profit.<sup>5</sup>

MacMillan agreed that, in her day, firms "manufacture shoddy things"<sup>6</sup> because, as Carpenter put it, the capitalist "winks at bad work so long as it

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Mann, 'What a compulsory 8-hour day means to the workers', in, John Laurent, ed., *Tom Mann Social and Economic Writings*, 37.

<sup>2</sup> See, C. Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929, Prophet of Human Fellowship*, 84, for a similar argument.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Co-operative Production*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 368.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret MacMillan, 'The Ethical End in Education', 97. The Margaret MacMillan Papers, A2A.

sells”<sup>1</sup> a process which forced the best man to adopt “the cunning acts of the worst”.<sup>2</sup>

This ‘scamping’ on contracts was a product of the competitive system. It degraded the worker by degrading the products of his labour but, perhaps more importantly, when the work was performed for the public it also defrauded the polity of their rights to receive good workmanship. Capitalism was thus explicitly anti-social. This was exemplified by the hostility shown by socialists on school boards to scamping on board contracts. In the Summer of 1900 Harry Bird reported to the school board electors of Walthamstow that there had been a delay in the construction of a new school in Blackhorse Road as a result of an attempt by the building contractor to use bricks of an inferior quality. This attempt at cost-cutting, or rather, profit-raising, had been discovered by the architect, but even after this discovery the builder still used the cheaper product. Though this matter was eventually settled at arbitration in favour of the board and the public<sup>3</sup> the deviousness of the contractor did not stop here. In November of the same year Bird reported that the board had received a delegation from the Plasterers’ and Carpenters’ Unions complaining of the conditions under which they were expected to work. Further investigation by the architect revealed that the roofing work on the premises was being done by a fly-by-night gang who turned up when the regular workforce had left the site. It hardly needs to be said that the contractor was charging the board for this labour at the full union rate and pocketing the balance.<sup>4</sup> Such chicanery and “jerry-building”<sup>5</sup> was more often than not done by non-union firms, so once again socialists found themselves campaigning for trade unionism.

Moreover, they also found themselves championing the cause of democratic and open government, for not only were such practices occasioned by the nature of capitalist competitiveness, they were given a further push by the graft that was also engendered by this greed-driven system. Eleven years before the Walthamstow branch published the evidence of scamping on the Blackhorse Road contract the national S.D.F. had, through the pages of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Co-operative Production*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Spoilation of Labour*. Notes for a lecture, Feb. 1886. The Carpenter Collection, Mss 32.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Y. Bird, ‘The Walthamstow School Board’, *The Socialist Critic*, 23 June 1900.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Y. Bird, ‘The Walthamstow School Board’, *The Socialist Critic*, 30 Nov. 1900.

<sup>5</sup> ‘No Sweating on School Board Contracts’, *The Democrat*, 1 Jan. 1889.



*Justice*, shown how these practices were “the natural result of jobbery”<sup>1</sup> which was itself the inevitable result of the “bourgeois system of society, and purity of administration is absolutely incompatible with capitalism.”<sup>2</sup> The paper argued that the provision of good, that is to say non-jerry-built schools, could be achieved under the capitalist system but only if the system were modified from its prevailing individualist manifestation by the use of direct labour teams to build schools for the public, paying the workers fair wages and conducting all business under the watchful eyes of an informed citizenry. This was only possible if the system were transformed beyond recognition.

### **Socialism and the politics of technical education**

Participation in any education system provided by the state under capitalism raised a certain level of caution amongst socialists since it was the fundamental presupposition that anything coming from such a source must be tainted because it had been created to perpetuate the system. This did not mean that mainstream socialists turned their backs on schools, and neither did it mean that they adopted a position that was indistinguishable to that of the Liberals. Writing in *Justice* in 1888, John Ward described technical education as a “two-sided question” with “a great deal to be said in favour of [it], and, under the present state of society, volumes to be urged against it.”<sup>3</sup> Nine years later, in *The Labour Leader*, an author wrote that the capitalist also felt a similar anxiety vis-a-vis technical education which placed him,

between the devil and the deep seas. If he does not support education for the masses, then he knows that his trade will leave him ... but if he does support it, then he has the uneasy idea that it will end by giving the lower orders notions about things.<sup>4</sup>

These ‘notions’ may well have had particularly nightmarish qualities for the capitalist, for, as John Ward continued, “an increase in technical knowledge would make our class more capable of controlling the means of production at the same time that it made them more determined to do so.”<sup>5</sup> The whole

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Scamped School Board Work’, *Justice*, 30 Nov. 1889.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> ‘Technical Education’, *Justice*, 18 Feb. 1888.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Concerning Education’, *The Labour Leader*, 25 Sept. 1897.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Technical Education’, *Justice*, 18 Feb. 1888.

point, therefore, about technical education as far as socialists were concerned, was that the point was not necessarily set in stone. It could be re-defined through struggle, and once thus re-defined, it could, though control of locally-elected school boards or technical education committees, be deployed to the material, cultural and above all morale-boosting benefit of the working class. The centrality of the work experience to the social position of the worker under the status quo, and the fact that work should be one of the key methods by which the individual connected with his society were ideas that resonated through the socialism of the period. Moreover, given that the ends of struggle and the means of struggle were routinely seen as, of necessity, being identical it must come as no surprise that work and technical education were very important issues. If socialists sought to centralise work that was both individually and communally beneficial in the society of the future they also held that it was necessary to make a start now by not only spreading the word of what was possible, but also by establishing such heightened patterns of work and its social recognition. This was part of the fundamental tenet that, “brotherhood must not only be talked of but practised.”<sup>1</sup> This practice was in part to be accomplished by an increase in the provision of a re-defined technical education.

That capitalists in the early part of this period did indeed feel ‘uneasy’ about technical education can be highlighted by an examination of the socialist press of the early 1880s which found it necessary to launch broadsides against the operators of British capitalism on the subject of technical education such as this comment from *The Labour Standard* of 1881.

There is one class of men who have a very great deal to do with the making of our artisans inefficient, for whom I cannot find the words to adequately condemn - I refer to managers and foremen who are neither scientific with head nor hand, who hold office for ‘bullying’, or because they can ‘cant’ well ... It is through such men as these that many of our young men who, after having served an apprenticeship, are fit for nothing better than common drudgery or rough labouring work.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Mann & Ben Tillet, ‘The New Trades Unionism’, in, John Laurent, ed., *Tom Mann Social and Economic Writings*, 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> William Simpson, ‘The Technical Education of our Artisans part V’, *The Labour Standard*, 5 Nov. 1881.

This was written by William Simpson who was the author of a series of eight articles on the subject. In another of these he recognised that this unwillingness on the part of capitalists to invest in technical education was part and parcel of the competitive system within which they all operated. Each capitalist, he wrote, saw the need for technical education, but was unwilling to provide it himself, lest his competitors reap the benefit by poaching the workers educated at his private expense.<sup>1</sup> His demands for a national system to co-ordinate a programme of technical education must be seen in the light of this as being highly critical of laissez-faire individualist capitalism. His articles, and the paper in general, argued for technical education as part of a programme designed to enable workers to improve their own economic, social and political position in life.

As well as criticising the attitudes and policies of capitalists in relation to technical education, socialists were critical of trade unions which sought to control technical education through the apprenticeship system. This could put socialists in a dilemma. The apprenticeship system was one way that workers could control the flow of labour into a trade and, therefore, one crucial mechanism by which they could defend the level of their wages. The system could thus be presented as a benefit to the class. However, even those socialists who saw some benefits in apprenticeships would not accept the system as it stood without reforms whilst others would not accept it at all. *Justice* stated that the apprenticeship system was “evil”.<sup>2</sup> The exclusivity at the heart of apprenticeships went totally against the paper’s cherished belief that education ought to be universal. The paper wanted a total reformation of the system of technical education with the establishment of a system of national, state-sponsored schools.

Though the desired system was to be national in its scope it was not to be of a uniform character throughout the country. There was also a recognition that the nature of technical education ought to reflect regional, even local industrial specialisms. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, William Morris stated that, “a man should not be obliged to come to London to learn his work, but should be able to in some way or other to do all that was necessary in the way of study in his own

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<sup>1</sup> William Simpson, ‘The Technical Education of our Artisans part VIII’, *The Labour Standard*, 31 Dec. 1881.

<sup>2</sup> H.W. Hobart, ‘Education part IV - Technical’, *Justice*, 21 July 1894.

town, wherever that might be.”<sup>1</sup> Each major urban and industrial centre should have its own specialised museums and colleges to enable this education to be provided. Socialists were strong advocates of keeping decision-making in government as local as possible. This localism in the curriculum of technical education fitted in harmoniously with this vision of the nature of the best form of society.

This kind of support for technical education was not without its critics from within the movement. W. Jones, for example, launched attacks on these ideas in the letters columns of the paper in 1883. “Technical education mongers”<sup>2</sup> were accused of seeking to do the capitalists’ work for them by portraying a community of interests between them and the workers which in reality did not exist. Jones argued that under the capitalist system, if technical education led to an increase in worker productivity, it would inevitably increase the strength of the system unless it were accompanied by an increase in wages. The point made here by Jones, was that such an increase in wages could only be won, it would never be given, and that this therefore necessitated a strong oppositional stand to the employers which did not seem to be at the root of demands for increased technical education.

Such views as this though were definitely those of a minority of the socialist movement. Jones’s argument seems to have been based on the premise that what was given to the workers could have no other use other than that imagined by those who gave it. This was, at bottom, a very apolitical attitude which refused to recognise the necessity for struggle to transform the existing structures of society and was accordingly rejected by the bulk of the movement. In 1897, for example, *The Labour Leader* carried an article that described technical education as being little more than a trick played by the capitalists. However, it added a very important caveat to this.

We believe in education. Yes, even in the education which the capitalists throw to us, as they throw money into the improvement of their machinery, for the sake of increasing its productive power and their competitive advantage over their foreign rivals. And for this reason, that human beings are not mere machines. You may go on improving a

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<sup>1</sup> The Royal Commission on Technical Instruction. Evidence Fifth day, 17 March 1882. Questions no 1585 & 1608.

<sup>2</sup> See, W. Jones, ‘Technical Education and Trades Unionism’, *The Labour Standard*, 20 Oct. 1883. And, 27 Oct. 1883.

machine till the end of time, and still use it for your own advantage. But you can't do that with Labour.<sup>1</sup>

*The Labour Standard* argued that the capitalist system was not maintained by economic forces alone but that these were aided by “humiliation, poverty and degradation” which tied the fetters of “commercial, political and moral bondage”<sup>2</sup> and that education was vitally necessary to break these chains. All children, whether of royal or common parents were born with the capacity to reason. Given that some were destined to a life in workshops it seemed only sensible that their education -with the long term view of removing these inequalities- should focus on what they knew from their day to day life. The removal of these social and political hierarchies could, moreover, be hastened if the budget of the royal household were, as the paper demanded, re-directed to technical education for the workers.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the century ruling elites were increasingly concerned about the detrimental effects of foreign competition in world markets and sections of them turned towards technical education as a panacea. This was often advanced though the Darwinian language of national efficiency. This was exposed for what it was by William Diack. “Your politicians boast about our ‘national greatness’, our ‘national prosperity’. National greatness!! National humbug! Don’t you know that (according to Dr Rhodes) if all the paupers in our land were formed into procession 4 abreast they would extend into a line over 100 miles in length.”<sup>4</sup> William Morris adopted a very similar position and argued that any increase in national efficiency would deliver, at best, only labourist demands which he labelled “demi-semi-socialism”.<sup>5</sup> Tom Mann echoed this. He clearly stated his loathing for any creed that postulated that it was necessary for the British workingman to drive his continental brethren into starvation if he himself was to survive. Increasing the competitive capacity of British capitalism was not the goal of technical education as it was advanced by socialists. They campaigned to teach the workers to, “value intelligent labour as a means not an end.”<sup>6</sup> This was altogether different from the aims of capitalists and their political representatives. Thus it is quite mistaken to

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Concerning Education’, *The Labour Leader*, 25 Sept. 1897.

<sup>2</sup> William Simpson, ‘The Technical Education of our Artisans’, *The Labour Standard*, 15 Oct. 1881.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* And, ‘The Technical Education Commission’, *The Labour Standard*, 10 Sept. 1881.

<sup>4</sup> William Diack, *Socialism and Current Politics*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> William Morris, *How I Became a Socialist*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Pearson, *The Moral Basis of Socialism*, 12-13.

see a community of interests between socialists and liberals in this period. This fundamental difference is all the more obvious when the proposed content of technical education programmes is examined, and it is to this aspect of the question that attention must now be turned.

### **The socialist plan for technical education**

Technical education was perceived by socialists as being education for the working class which would, in addition, heighten their perceptions of themselves as being of great collective value to society. The workers were defined as those who produced. Recent revisionist historians have attempted to use this classification of 'productive' and 'unproductive' as part of a project aimed at showing the 'universalist' nature of much of what was demanded by radicals and socialists in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Much of what has already been presented in this chapter must show that socialist discourse did not admit the middle class as a group into the category defined as 'productive'. This conclusion is borne out by an analysis of precisely what type of technical education socialists proposed. Had they viewed the middle class as 'industrious' one might reasonably expect socialists to have argued for the provision of that type of education, commercial education, that was geared to the types of careers pursued by the middle class. However, this was most emphatically not the case.<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, for one, thought that in mentioning that a man was able to "calculate compound interest" he, Lowerison, was impugning the other's character.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth pointing out that there was one exception to this socialist rule, namely Sidney Webb.<sup>4</sup> Webb was one of the members of the Technical Education Board of the London County Council to be appointed to a Special Sub-Committee to examine the best ways to increase the supply of commercial education in the capital.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to Graham Wallas (another member of the Special Sub-Committee) he argued that London needed

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<sup>1</sup> James Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 310.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain c.1850-1914*. Especially, 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, *In England Now*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Webb was singled out by *Justice* for searing criticism over his support for the apprenticeship system. See, H.W. Hobart, 'Education IV - Technical,' *Justice*, 21 July 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Cloudesley Brereton, 'Commercial education', *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, Vol. 8, 1899.

“half a dozen commercial schools.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere he complained that the commercial men of London did not demand enough commercial education from the Technical Education Committee.<sup>2</sup> In this, as with so many other things, he spoke for himself and his acolytes rather than the wider Fabian Society, let alone British socialism of the period. Clerical workers were despised by socialists for much the same reasons that Simeon Twigg railed against teachers. They were clearly exploited but did nothing about it. In fact the position was even worse than this. Rather than doing nothing, clerks were actually vocal supporters of the system. Anderson reports that railway clerks refused to blame their employers for closing avenues of promotion which kept clerks in the lowest status positions, “which often meant the continuance of drudgery”, arguing that the employers had a perfect right to make whatever use of themselves as employees that they, the employers, wanted.<sup>3</sup>

The twenty years studied here were part of a period that saw the number of men employed as clerks increase from 130,000 in 1861, to 739,000 in 1911, by which time there were also 157,000 women working in offices.<sup>4</sup> In 1884 *Justice* noted that, “the children of poor clerks who come neatly dressed to school often have a lean and hungry look that speaks volumes.”<sup>5</sup> Their poverty was actually made worse throughout this period by the increased provision of education which led to an increase in the supply of young men who were literate and numerate so that, “the first class clerk has to be satisfied with a miserable pittance.”<sup>6</sup> *The Labour Leader* concurred with this view and further agreed that this was in no way a good argument for a reduction in education.<sup>7</sup> Both papers saw that education would help the workers to struggle against the system that produced low wages. There was also the recognition that though they were “bound to a wheel”<sup>8</sup> clerks did nothing to alleviate their own position. There were structural factors inherent in the nature of clerical work that acted to produce these attitudes. The organisation of the workplace isolated clerks from each other and the world at large and produced a workplace culture that was stultifying and

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, 6 Sept. 1900. The Wallas Papers, 1/25.

<sup>2</sup> *The Woman's Signal*, 11 Nov. 1896. The Passfield Papers, 61:2.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, 100.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Laybourn, *The History of British Trade Unionism*, 87.

<sup>5</sup> A Board School Teacher, ‘Government Torture of Children’, *Justice*, 27 Sept. 1884.

<sup>6</sup> John Ward, ‘Technical Education’, *Justice*, 18 Feb. 1888.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Concerning Education’, *The Labour Leader*, 25 Sept. 1897.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Rutherford, ‘The Deliverance’, in, Christopher Harver et al, eds., *Industrialisation and Culture*, 401.

trivial, “wracked by status-anxieties ... almost immune from working-class politics.”<sup>1</sup> Rutherford reported an interview with a clerk, named Clark, which captured this milieu.

He has told me with a kind of shame what effect it had upon him - that sometimes for days he would feed upon the prospect of the most childish trifle because it would break in some slight degree the uniformity of his toil. For example, he would sometimes change from quill to steel pens and back again.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than tap into the solidarity that Clayton saw latent in collective work this pointless scribbling and appalling monotony bred in its captives a “filthy grossness”<sup>3</sup> and moral degeneracy of the type that Carpenter so loathed.

The type of commercial education offered to working-class entrants to this world was of a kind which made men, “unintelligent and unobservant”.<sup>4</sup> Mastery of shorthand, for example, would render its practitioner little better than a letter-writing machine. This type of education was designed to keep clerks hard at this nonsensical work and not allow serious progression up the commercial hierarchy to positions of real power. Therefore, whilst those destined for a high-flying career might be expected to study broadly, “for lads who must enter business early in life as clerks, the course must be simplified.” Thus *Sonnenschein’s Encyclopaedia of Education*, reported the words of *The Chamber of Commerce Journal* of July 1888 and went on to make even clearer how in the commercial world, as with the rest of late-Victorian society, there was a two-tier education system propping up a glass ceiling above the working class. There was, it continued, a “necessity of recognising two kinds of commercial education for ... (1) employees or clerks, and (2) principals, managers, agents, and other responsible heads of business firms”.<sup>5</sup> The National Association for The Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education also propounded the view that there must be a division of labour within commercial education to reflect and reinforce the division of power within the commercial world. Reporting the findings of Webb’s Special Sub-Committee the Association’s journal was at pains to

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<sup>1</sup> Ross McKibben, ‘Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?’ *English Historical Review*, April 1984, 300.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Rutherford, ‘The Deliverance’, in, Christopher Harver et al, eds., *Industrialisation and Culture*, 400.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Sidney E. Dark, ‘Socialists and Education’, *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1893.

<sup>5</sup> *Sonnenschein’s Encyclopaedia of Education*, 438.



point out that the first question any examination commercial education had to answer was, “what is really meant by commercial education?” The answer was revealing.

What is wanted for the boy who enters business at 14, is entirely inadequate and unsuitable for the youth who enters at 17 or 18, and the training for a ‘work-a-day’ clerk or salesman will scarcely do for a captain of industry. Commerce must be split up into grades if it is to be dealt with intelligently. The Committee propose ... three main grades: one for those who enter business at 14, another for those who enter at 16 or 18, and, lastly, for those who enter at 20 or even later. The three grades correspond roughly to the rank and file, the ordinary officers, and the staff corps of the great army of industry and commerce.<sup>1</sup>

In order to realise this direct correspondence between the teachers and providers of commercial education and ‘the great army of commerce’, advocates of commercial education were desperately keen to get “*practical commercial men* who have, or have had, some *real knowledge at first hand* of what the commercial world needs”,<sup>2</sup> either into the classroom itself, or into the administration of commercial schools. These advocates looked covetously at the French and German systems wherein such ‘real’ experience was, in many cases, a necessary pre-requisite to a career as a teacher of the arts of commerce.

This ‘realistic’ education was often presented by its supporters as being strikingly modern and progressive in design. Thus pedagogic emphasis was, for example, placed on the teaching of modern languages as opposed to the classics, with the focus on language use rather than reading the great works of literature. For example Sidney Webb, a keen proponent of commercial education, described “grammar, parsing and paraphrasing” as “lunatic abominations”.<sup>3</sup> Politically this ‘modern’ commercial education was often associated with elements of the liberal political package and was seen as a better bulwark against the threat of foreign competition than mere protectionism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cloudesley Brereton, ‘Commercial Education’, *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, Vol. 8, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Editorial Notes’, *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, May 1892. Italics in Original. See also, ‘Commercial Education’, *The School Board Gazette*, March 1899.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, 6 Sept. 1900. The Wallas Papers, 1/25.

<sup>4</sup> See, *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, 1892, p333. 1899, p199. And 1902, pp216-217.

Socialists were strongly opposed to the teaching of the 'dead vocables' of the classics, but they saw through this progressive gloss on commercial education. One of their main criticisms of existing education was that it did not produce individuals but rather ground out interchangeable cogs for the capitalist machine. No amount of progressive pedagogy would convince them that commercial education had anything to offer other than the production of the most base components of this machine. Commercial education thus fell foul of the main principals of turn of the century socialism. It was undemocratic in both its design and its use. It was a two-tier system producing graduates who would enter and shore up a two-tier power structure in society.

If socialists did not want commercial education what did they want? Here there was some difference of emphasis within the movement. Some advocated the teaching of manual skills such as carpentry or needlework, whilst others wanted scientific principles to be the core of the syllabus. Either position could be defended within the frame of reference of socialist discourse and the two could, in fact, co-exist with little conflict. The former could be seen as an attempt to remove, "the old idea of the disgrace of work" substituting for it, "ideas of the dignity of labour." In the socialist commonwealth all would work and so, "the best preparation for the new social system ... is the placing now in the hands of all children the foundations of the knowledge and skill which in years to come they will require."<sup>1</sup> Such work was, moreover, healthy. Annie Besant's manifesto for the 1888 London School Board elections put forward all these points and added another. If children were taught basic manual skills it would enable them to make the choice of a trade when they left school as opposed to being forced into a job chosen by their parents.<sup>2</sup>

Lowerison was an advocate of teaching children how to use tools. Ruskin School was more often than not run on a shoestring budget and to make ends meet he undertook a lot of the routine maintenance of the premises. This once involved him in digging a new drainage ditch. After this experience he wrote that only a person who had never tried such work could

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Burrows, 'Social Democracy and Education', *Justice*, 13 Oct. 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Annie Besant, 'School Board Elections', *Link*, 18 Aug. 1888.

ever describe it as unskilled.<sup>1</sup> The village carpenter instructed the boys in woodworking skills and Mrs Lowerison taught the girls needlecraft.<sup>2</sup>

An article of his in *The Clarion* advancing this general line was criticised by one of its readers in the following week's letters page. This correspondent argued that what was needed was technical education, "not 'training' in trades. Principles should be taught, not details. Training in trades merely means teaching the use of tools, or how to make something at a low price, and is not wanted."<sup>3</sup> This writer represented the second socialist position on the content of a course of technical education. His criticism of Lowerison's ideas is, however, very untypical. Most socialists were content to let both positions co-exist and indeed Lowerison, who was an extremely ardent advocate of science and scientific education, represented a prime example of the embodiment of this co-existence. Another example came in *The Labour Standard*, which was full of praise for the work of The Royal Commission on Technical Education, to which William Morris gave evidence. The paper proposed that school boards establish a new type of school, called Intermediate Schools, at which children would learn both manual skills, such as the use of tools, and science.<sup>4</sup> In *Seed-time* Alfred Carpenter wrote that these two could be combined as there was no better way to learn, for example, geometry, than by the practical application of its principles through, for example, carpentry lessons.<sup>5</sup>

Lowerison, like most socialists believed that both girls and boys could, and should learn science, (the only exception to this seems to have been Graham Wallas who had "a horror" of girls learning science<sup>6</sup>) which was, therefore, taught to both at Ruskin School. However, his school segregated the teaching of practical skills on traditional gender lines. Here again he was typical of the movement which did not seriously challenge either the gendered division of household tasks, or the predominant division of public, paid work for men and private, unpaid work for women. Feminists within the movement argued against this. Christabel Pankhurst, for example, wrote that, "the technical teaching at present provided for women is most

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<sup>1</sup> 'Harry Lowerison's Success. Mr. Lowerison's Report', *The Clarion*, 18 March 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mrs Elaine Auger (nee Lowerison).

<sup>3</sup> C.W. Stewart, 'Technical Education in Elementary Schools', *The Clarion*, 25 Feb. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> 'Editorial', *The Labour Standard*, 24 May 1884.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Carpenter, 'Manual Instruction in Schools', *Seed-time*, Oct. 1895.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, 6 Sept. 1900. The Wallas Papers, 1/25.

unsatisfactory - in no other direction than this is educational equality more needed. The difficulty which they experience in obtaining technical training is a serious disadvantage industrially to women.”<sup>1</sup> Most socialists agreed with the principle expressed by Pankhurst and criticised the desire by working-class mothers to have their daughters at home helping them with chores rather than attend school. However, when it came to the practice of technical education these same socialists insisted that these girls be taught only how better to perform these same household tasks. Sparling demanded equality at work for women<sup>2</sup> and Dan Irving extended this into the realms of training by demanding that boys and girls be given full rights to receive training in whatever skills or handicrafts they wanted regardless of whether convention dictated that these be taught as single-sex subjects.<sup>3</sup> In his future utopia John Richardson's curriculum presented needlework and carpentry to both sexes and greatly extended the range of practical trades to be taught to girls.<sup>4</sup> However, these were relatively isolated positions and it is possible to find amongst their contemporaries examples of the opposite view that far outnumber them.

Montague Blatchford, for example, was full of praise for a school he visited where the little girls were “as busy as bees” at cooking while their brothers were learning woodwork.<sup>5</sup> Similar praise was to be found in *Link* which reported in glowing terms a technical school for girls in Brussels where the pupils were taught needlework, cookery and laundry skills.<sup>6</sup> This example may well have been cited to bolster Besant's own stated preferences as given in her manifesto for the school board election four months previously. Here she argued that girls should be taught dressmaking, sewing, sweeping, scouring, polishing, washing and cooking, whilst their brothers learned basic carpentry skills.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Sidney Webb thought that whilst they should be in the same class for science it was right and proper for boys and girls to be separated for cooking and sewing or woodwork.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christabel Pankhurst, ‘The Education Bill - A Woman's point of view’, *The Labour Leader*, 31 May 1902.

<sup>2</sup> H. H. Sparling, *The Morality of Laziness, a lecture delivered at the Gracechurch St. Labour Club*, n.d.. The Pickles Papers, Pic/111.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Irving, ‘The Physical Basis of Education’, *The Social Democrat*, vol. IV, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> John Richardson, *It can be done*, 30-37.

<sup>5</sup> M. Blatchford, ‘The Education of Today and Tomorrow No.4’, *The Clarion*, 24 Jan. 1902.

<sup>6</sup> ‘A Technical School for Girls’, *The Link*, 1 Dec. 1888.

<sup>7</sup> Annie Besant, ‘School Board Election’, *Link*, 18 Aug. 1888.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, 6 Sept. 1900. The Wallas Papers, 1/25. And, ‘Mr. Sidney Webb, Chairman of the Technical Education Board, What the Board does for Women and Girls’, *The Woman's Signal*, 21 Feb. 1895. The Passfield Papers, section VI, 58:1.

Science was a popular subject with sections of the working class. As Ross McKibben has noted workers, “were often keenly interested in machinery and took pleasure in examining and discussing it.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise G.N. Barnes, General Secretary of the A.S.E., saw technical education as a relaxing hobby for workers.<sup>2</sup> Lowerison wrote on astronomy for *The Clarion* (this was a hobby he shared with both the paper’s editor, his good friend Robert Blatchford, and Tom Mann<sup>3</sup>). The engineers who worked at the arsenal in Woolwich and who formed the community to whom the local I.L.P. sold its *Labour Journal*, would have noticed the paper’s ‘science scraps’ column. A typical edition of this contained short pieces on electrolyte aluminium, liquid nitrogen, blast furnace gases and cementation steel.<sup>4</sup> This could be seen as a marketing device, with socialists pitching their papers towards the leisure or intellectual interests of their readership. However, this is to assume that the writers and the readers were of two different social groups and that socialists were a sect separated from the class by a clear cultural divide.<sup>5</sup> Another possible explanation is that the writers included material about science since they were of the same group as their readers and thus knew that the interest was real because they shared it themselves.

The ‘progressive’ trappings of commercial education were reviled by socialists but science had real progressive potential in that it could be used to expose the shams of religion. As an ardent secularist Lowerison was well aware of this and, across the political divide, so was Balfour who, in 1902, stated his belief that,

all worthwhile education must be permeated with the religious spirit and also that the teaching of ‘popular’ science, or the teaching of any science to those who were not of the intellectual elite was harmful to the very foundation of society and to the continuance of that ‘tender plant’ - progress.<sup>6</sup>

Socialists wanted science to be the core of a technical education curriculum not only because it was the theoretical underpinning of industry and technology and a very useful tool in the battle against religion, but also

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<sup>1</sup> Ross McKibben, ‘Work and Hobbies in Britain, 1880-1950’, in, Ross McKibben, *The Ideologies of Class, social relations in Britain 1880-1950*, 153.

<sup>2</sup> G.N. Barnes, ‘Technical Training’, *The Trades Unionist*, Oct. 1898.

<sup>3</sup> See, letter from Robert Blatchford to A. Wallace 29 Oct. 1893. British Library Add. Manu. 46441 f247. For Tom Mann, see, Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Science Scraps’, *The Labour Journal*, Aug. 1902, 5.

<sup>5</sup> For this conclusion see Waters, *British Socialists*.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Eaglesham, *Planning the Education Bill Of 1902*, 24.

because socialists approved of the best practice in the way it was taught. It was a series of demonstration science lessons given by Thomas Twining in East London<sup>1</sup> that first attracted Gould to more progressive teaching methods. *The Socialist* described a series of simple scientific experiments of the type that Lowerison demonstrated to his pupils. These were designed to show the expansion of metal when heated. The important point was that the children actually “see with their own eyes what are the ways of nature and what are the invariable rules by which she works.”<sup>2</sup> This, rather than book learning, would, “develop the intelligence of the scholar more rapidly than any other subject at present taught in the schools.”<sup>3</sup> It would also provide a very useful and welcome break in the “wearying round of reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the argument ran, science must be at the core of the curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

Both these socialist approaches to technical education stressed the importance of heightening the children’s awareness of the social value of work through active participation in the learning process. This was not only better pedagogy, but it could also contribute to the strengthening of the producers’ moral belief in themselves as being of civic worth. Work occupied, and indeed still occupies, an ambivalent position in social life, being, at one and the same time, a source of frustration, exhaustion and exasperation but also of pride, creativity and fellowship. Socialists, in turn of the century Britain, sought to tip this balance decisively in favour of the latter. Work was perhaps, above all, a social activity and socialists wanted to give work the recognition it deserved. This involved heightening the sense of self and social worth of those who worked and central to this project was the issue of technical education.

Socialists could both assert that work ought to be rewarding and that, in reality, it was not because they were actively involved in the struggle to effect a transformation of these processes of production from the latter type to the former. Their attempts to re-define technical education clearly

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to S.H.G. Twining, Director of Twinings, for this information.

<sup>2</sup> H. Brown, ‘Technical Education in Sunderland’, *The Socialist*, Oct.-Nov. 1894.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

demonstrated this commitment to the issue of work. The syllabus proposed for technical education also made plain their commitment to the working class. The view of technical education brought forward was an integral part of the wider socialist analysis of society which imparted a new and potentially powerful transformative feature to the late nineteenth century debates on technical education.

# CHAPTER 5

## Socialism, education and democracy

We socialists want that there should be **enough High Schools** (or rather the best schools that we know how to provide) **for all the children in the land**, so that each one of them may be made ready alike for noble work and noble play and be noble men and noble women in the right sense of the word when they are grown up.  
Katherine Bruce Glasier, *Socialism for Children*, 1.

That a powerful and emotive appeal to democratic egalitarianism was central to the socialism of the 1880s and 1890s can be seen by the fact that editorials in *Justice* were just as likely to open with the salutation “Fellow Citizens!” as with “Comrades!”. Since education was so central to this socialism it is no surprise to find such concerns both reflected and reinforced within socialist works on education. The positions adopted by socialists in this period with regard to the function and organisation of education in a democracy have attracted the critical attentions of several historians. The first of these is Rodney Barker who, in his authoritative survey of the Labour Party and education, compared the thinking of socialists unfavourably with that of Hobson. Hobson’s opinion that secondary education was, “an essential qualification for intelligent and active citizenship in a democratic society” and should thus be supplied universally, was one which, according to Barker, was found only “in a rather fleeting manner, in the proposals of socialists”.<sup>1</sup> Whilst Barker thus seems to believe that turn of the century socialists paid too little attention to the state and the power of education within a democracy, Hilda Kean reached a very different conclusion. It is her opinion that socialists, at least the S.D.F. (in the period after 1900), were “statist”. “Far from criticising the role of the state in working class life ... it was argued that the needs of the working class should be met by the existing structures of the state”

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney Barker, *Education and Politics 1900-1951 - A Study of the Labour Party*, 18.



which were themselves viewed by the S.D.F. as “benevolent”.<sup>1</sup> Kean, unlike Barker, recognised that there were socialist demands for a greatly expanded education system, but she criticised these demands for focusing attention and aspirations upon the existing structures of the state rather than creating “an alternative to the state system, under workers’ control.”<sup>2</sup>

Although their overall projects are very different to Kean’s, this view of the socialist attitude to the state is one that is put forward separately by Howell and Waters. Howell has noted that what he calls the “reformism” of the I.L.P. rested on, “beliefs about the neutrality of existing institutions.”<sup>3</sup> This is a view similarly held by Waters, “socialists viewed the state more benevolently, often attempting to make use of it, especially at the local level, in their struggle to bring culture to the people.”<sup>4</sup>

It will be the argument of this chapter that a detailed examination of socialist education policy casts doubt on all of these conclusions. Socialists were able both to comprehend and use the power of the state through school boards in a way that had the potential to transform the status quo. This chapter will proceed with an examination of the characteristics of a democratic education in socialist discourse and then locate this schema in socialist political positioning in education debates. This will be followed by a review of the socialist view of the state which will locate the importance of school boards both as policy-making sites and as institutional formulations for socialism.

## **Defining a democratic education**

When discussing the late nineteenth century the hero of Edward Bellamy’s novels, who had been transported to the future, remarked that the importance of a good education, funded by the state until the age of twenty was, “fully accepted in theory”.<sup>5</sup> In the late nineteenth century socialists not only accepted this in theory, but they viewed education and democracy as indivisible and sought their simultaneous advance. They argued that any increase in democratic forms (such as payment of members, or a franchise

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<sup>1</sup> Hilda Kathleen Kean, *State Education Policy 1900-1930: The Nature of The Socialist and Teacher Trade Unionist Response*, 67 & 69.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 300.

<sup>3</sup> Howell, *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888-1906*, 361.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, 153.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Equality*, 247.

extension) that was not accompanied by an advance in education would have handed an easy victory to the forces of reaction for, “to advocate democratic forms all by themselves is a very great blunder. It diverts men’s minds from what they wish to get to certain mechanical changes, which, unless the people are thoroughly educated, may be dextrously turned against them by means of their own votes.”<sup>1</sup> The S.D.F. pioneered language which has since become associated with Hobson when it argued that an uneducated person was far less able to make a contribution to society than one who was educated and was, in fact, far more likely to be a danger to his fellow citizens.<sup>2</sup> Through this waste both parties were “robbed”, the child of his future and the community of his potential contributions which were lost irremediably to ignorance.<sup>3</sup> The assumption of the duties, and the exercise of the rights of citizenship in an intelligent manner, were thus crucially dependent upon the citizen’s potential intelligence being realised by the community at large through the provision of state education. “If democracy is to be a fact”, as an appeal by *The Socialist* to the school board electors of Sunderland ran, “every person must be free, economically, intellectually, and morally. To accomplish this the first essential is a large and full education.”<sup>4</sup>

Within their discussion of the role of education in a democracy this ‘large and full education’ was defined by five areas of principal concern. These were, the provision of free and compulsory education, the need for this to be secular, provided by means of a common school system, delivered by a methodology that was not centred on examinations and cramming and which was to encompass, lastly, secondary education. Each of these will now be examined in turn.

In one of his lectures Morris told his audience that one of the vital prerequisites of any successful education was simply that all people have the opportunity to get an education.<sup>5</sup> “Equal opportunities educationally is the real equaliser” as one writer in *The Labour Leader* put it.<sup>6</sup> This “Equality of Education” may have been woven into the banners of the

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<sup>1</sup> H.M. Hyndman, ‘Democratic Form and Socialist Substance’, *Justice*, 3 Nov. 1900.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Herbert Burrows, ‘Social-Democracy and Education III’, *Justice*, 20 Oct. 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Taylor, ‘The Education of the People III’, *Justice*, 29 June 1889.

<sup>4</sup> ‘School Board Election’, *The Socialist*, Dec.-Jan. 1894-95.

<sup>5</sup> William Morris, ‘On Education in Art - report of a lecture given at Clerkenwell branch of The Socialist League’, in, *The Architect*, 17 Sept. 1886.

<sup>6</sup> Compo, ‘Child Labour’, *The Labour Leader*, 28 July 1900.

socialist army marching to free the children,<sup>1</sup> but in late nineteenth century Britain the provision of free education by the state did not necessarily translate into that right being granted by the patchwork of authorities responsible for delivering education.

In 1893 *Fabian News* sent out an appeal to its readers to report on whether or not education was free in their areas since, “complaints have reached us from several quarters that the local educational powers are doing their best to render the Free Education Act ineffective.”<sup>2</sup> The Fabian Society printed forms which parents could use to petition for a free education for their children. One of the areas to which the paper may have been keen to send these forms was Stockport. Here Simeon Twigg of *The Clarion* found that it was necessary to explain to parents precisely what their entitlements were as, “difficulties are being placed in the way of the workers getting the rights that the law allows them, and that these difficulties are being created by the managers of the voluntary schools.”<sup>3</sup> This was sabotage of “one of the most important things that could be handled by working men,”<sup>4</sup> and as such was to be resisted and fought against at all costs. *The Labour Chronicle* reported how the local “big-wigs” in the still-rural parish of Halewood, Liverpool, used the church’s parish magazine to publish the names of those who had agreed to pay fees at the local church school thus singling out those who had previously and successfully demanded their rights to a free education for their children. “We all know what this means in a village like Halewood; it means downright intimidation of the most polished kind.”<sup>5</sup> From the metropolitan districts of Liverpool the paper exposed victimisation not of parents, but of children whose parents had obtained their rights to a free education. These children were removed from their usual schools and sent to dilapidated premises which the paper reported were injurious to the children’s health and sure to stunt their desire for learning.<sup>6</sup> Similar tactics were pursued by the “parcel of stupid and bigoted religionists”<sup>7</sup> in power on the Blackburn School Board, which the *Blackburn Labour Journal* styled the ‘Backward School Board’. Here, parents of children at the Moss Street and Four Lane Ends Schools who

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<sup>1</sup> The phrases are from Catherine Conway’s, *The Cry of the Children*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> ‘School Board Education’, *Fabian News*, Feb. 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Simeon Twigg, ‘Free Education’, *The Clarion*, 9 Dec. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Sam Reeves, ‘Liberalism and Labour’, *The Labour Chronicle*, Aug. 1894.

<sup>6</sup> ‘School Board Election’, *The Labour Chronicle*, Nov. 1894.

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Backward School Board’, *The Blackburn Labour Journal*, Feb. 1898.

petitioned for their rights were humiliated in the most contemptuous way that late nineteenth century politics could muster, they were referred to the Poor-Law Guardians.

Socialists placed themselves firmly at the head of campaigns to secure the right to free education as this handbill makes plain<sup>1</sup>:

# **FREE EDUCATION**

for

## **ASHTON - UNDER-LYNE AND DUCKINGFIELD**

*The Trades Council and the Fabian  
Society, together with numerous advocates of*

### **FREE and EFFICIENT EDUCATION.**

*have resolved to promote a Petition to the  
Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council  
on education to provide Free Places for all  
children between the ages of 3 and 15,  
of those parents who desire Free Education  
in accordance with the Education Act*

*You will be called upon in the course of  
a few days for your signature to the petition,  
and the promoters trust that you will assist them  
to ensure the success of the movement*

*CHAS. F. PARIONAGE, Secretary Ashton Trades Council  
THOS. PENNINGTON, Secretary, Ashton Fabian Society  
HENRY T. LAWSON.*

Hardie's *Labour Leader* keenly reported on 'Free Books Crusades' from various corners of the country in which socialists were to be seen playing a leading role using the facts and advice provided for them by their national press.<sup>2</sup> For example, R. Looney wrote to Keir Hardie to ask him to raise in Parliament the question of the West Hartlepool School Board charging 6d

<sup>1</sup> Handbill in Coll. Misc. 375.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, 'Free Books Crusade', *The Labour Leader*, 4 Dec. 1897, and, 'A Free Books Victory', *The Labour Leader*, 12 March 1898.

per week per scholar plus 2d for books.<sup>1</sup> When they were placed on school boards, socialists such as Robert Smillie of the S.D.F. in Larkhall, could even be pivotal in securing victory.<sup>2</sup> Larkhall was only the second town in Scotland to provide free books. Others, including Glasgow, followed this example. In his autobiography Smillie wrote, “I am prouder of nothing in my life more than this triumph.”<sup>3</sup>

Socialists opposed the influence held by religious denominations over education for two reasons. Firstly, they opposed the views that were inculcated in these establishments. As the *Labour Annual* put it, “some board schools turn out crowd of little savages, but the church schools are calculated to turn out nothing but flunkies.”<sup>4</sup> This was the reasoning behind F.J. Gould’s action on the Leicester School Board. In the Autumn of 1900 Gould was elected to the Board coming second in the poll with 15,669 votes. His fellow members consisted of seven for the church party and seven for the Liberal non-conformist block. Gould thus had the casting vote and used his position to attack the use of religious instruction as the medium of moral education. He proposed its replacement with his own system of secular moral instruction. His system was adopted but under a compromise, it ran alongside, rather than instead of, biblical instruction. Nonetheless, for a one-man crusade, this was a considerable victory and Gould took heart from the fact that this system was copied by authorities in Devon, Bradford and the West Riding.<sup>5</sup>

The second foundation of socialist opposition to clerical power in education was that it was symptomatic of the undemocratic nature of the state. “As a matter of fact denominational schools are not organised to be effective means of educating the children in them as citizens, but as members of the religious body by which they are supported.”<sup>6</sup> Since they received public funds, the argument ran, what this amounted to was the granting of special privileges to religion. The 1870 Act had been designed to reinforce this bias by stipulating that a school board could not be established where

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from R. Looney to J. Keir Hardie, 27 July 1893. The Johnson Papers, I.L.P. 4, 93-71.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, 298.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Smillie, *My Life for Labour*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Education: The Religious Difficulty’, *The Labour Annual* 1906, 96-7.

<sup>5</sup> The information in this paragraph comes from David Nash, *Secularism, Art and Freedom*, 119-121.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Educational Gossip’, *The People’s Press*, 16 Aug. 1890.

adequate places were secured in denominational schools and by its giving the voluntary societies time to raise funds to meet any shortfall.<sup>1</sup>

Socialists argued that, in any democracy, there ought to be one education system for all children. “All the evils of our present patchwork system would disappear with the inauguration of truly democratic machinery.”<sup>2</sup> This was the basis of socialist support for school boards and led to opposition to the existence of religious and private schools. J.E. Broadbent, campaigning for a seat on the Oldham School Board in 1891, advocated, “the common school system - namely, that all children should be taught without distinction of class.”<sup>3</sup> The common school was, an article in *Link*, explained, “the foundation of true democracy” which would “lay the basis for real equality.”<sup>4</sup>

Secondary and University education and careers giving high pay, status and power were middle and upper-class preserves from which the bulk of the population were excluded by a ring fence of expense and prejudice.<sup>5</sup> *The Labour Standard* reported a fear amongst, “those who have hitherto monopolised all the good things that flow from the national exchequer”, that they might lose this monopoly of pay, prestige and power were the general population to be educated.<sup>6</sup> Twenty years later *The Labour Journal* endorsed this argument and added that it was not only necessary for the working class to be educated but also that there be popular control of this education system.<sup>7</sup> If equal citizenship was to be realised it was absolutely essential that the state educate all citizens equally. Socialists saw this as an opportunity to break down class barriers. Though they saw the mixing of children from various backgrounds as important in itself they did not argue that this alone would destroy the class system which was far too entrenched for that. Equal schooling for all, from elementary school to university, was also seen as opening the doors to power for the gifted but poor child. This power, once seized, could then be used in a socialist manner. It was,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, ‘The State and Education’, *The Labour Elector*, Aug. 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Muse, ‘Socialism and Education’, *Justice*, 4 July 1896.

<sup>3</sup> J. E. Broadbent’s handbill for the Oldham School Board Election of 1891. Coll. Misc. 375.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Free, Secular, Compulsory, Technical Education for all’, *Link*, 3 Nov. 1888.

<sup>5</sup> S.G. Hobson, ‘Labour and Education’, *The Labour Prophet*, July 1894.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Earl Spencer on Education’, *The Labour Standard*, 8 Oct. 1881.

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Educational Crisis. An appeal to trades unionists’, *The Labour Journal*, Jan. 1901. And, ‘Education’, *The Labour Journal*, May 1903.

therefore, both the product of a common school system and the experience of it which was seen to be of use in socialising society.<sup>1</sup>

However, socialists did not ignore any class bias in the classroom methodologies used. As has been seen in previous chapters socialists opposed the prevalent educational methodologies. Their attention focused on the centrality of the cramming for examinations which so dominated class time. To ensure that society became fully democratic it was considered necessary that its citizens must have the intellectual ability to be fully independent and capable of building a rational and constructive critique of their surroundings. These skills were the last thing taught in any elementary school of this period. "Reading aloud together, standing, together, sitting in the same posture, changing it at the same moment etc. etc. may be all absolutely necessary under the present circumstances, but such mechanical routine is hardly calculated to develop the thinking powers."<sup>2</sup> Herbert Burrows of the S.D.F. wrote that if these aspects of the education system were not reformed it would turn out generations of boys and girls who would, "never be really fit to assume the duties of citizenship."<sup>3</sup>

One of the most important components of the education for citizenship proposed by socialists was secondary education but, as *Justice* observed in 1887, "now secondary education, under present conditions, simply means middle-class education."<sup>4</sup> The Scottish education system was different to that in England but the class bias was the same. A. Kirkland, a socialist member of the school board in Irvine, Ayrshire, wrote to Keir Hardie detailing the local status quo on this point.

In the allotting of the grant for secondary education in Ayrshire the academy here in Irvine has received £380. The Academy is one of the secondary schools of the county but there is a tendency amongst a class that has been supported by the majority of the board in Irvine to keep and maintain this as a class school. The result is that not one more free place is given ... the boon of secondary education so far as Irvine is concerned will still be the lot of the few who can pay. ... I have been insulted and trampled upon in my endeavour to make it binding that all bone fide pupils

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, 'The Education Crisis', *The Labour Leader*, 27 July 1901.

<sup>2</sup> H. Jennie Elcum, 'Schools and Education', *The Clarion*, 10 Oct. 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Burrows, 'Social Democracy and Education III', *Justice*, 20 Oct. 1888.

<sup>4</sup> 'Secondary Education', *Justice*, 9 July 1887.

who have passed the sixth standard in the elementary schools should be entered free at the Academy.<sup>1</sup>

Not all school boards were as compliant with the local notables as Irvine's. Indeed school boards were ultimately abolished after the Cockerton judgement ruled that the provision of higher elementary board schools, which were de-facto secondary schools, was illegal. One of the groups most assiduously campaigning for their abolition had been the headmasters and supporters of schools like the Academy in Irvine, that is the grammar schools threatened by the free, good quality type of secondary education provided by the higher grade schools. That these higher grade schools were the people's secondary schools was obvious to all concerned at the time. *The School Board Gazette* described these schools as being, "for the higher education of the people." They were, it continued, born out of the "popular desire, prevented from satisfaction by the high fees of existing secondary schools, and by the type of education supplied in them" they were designed on,

more democratic lines, and more in touch with the requirements of modern times. It is this *popular upthrust* that constitutes the main principle in the charter for the existence of such schools, just as the second is the *popular character of the curriculum* which has made them successful. They are now recognised as the high schools for the children of the people.<sup>2</sup>

This was borne out by the following statistics which were presented by The National Education Association at the time of the abolition of school boards which show, as percentages, the social background of boys and girls attending higher grade schools:

PARENTS		% Boys	% Girls
1.	Persons of independent means	1.6	1.9
2.	Professional men	3.4	3.5
3.	Teachers	1.4	1.8
4.	Manufacturers	6.0	5.2
5.	Managers	4.8	5.5
6.	Farmers	1.2	1.3
7.	Retail Tradesmen	15.1	15.9
8.	Commercial Travellers	4.1	4.8
9.	Salesmen, Shop Assistants	2.5	3.3
10.	Clerks, Book-keepers, etc.	9.4	9.4
11.	Subordinate Officials, Post, Telegraph Service, etc.	3.5	3.2
12.	Foremen, Responsible railwaymen, etc.	5.9	6.3
13.	Workmen at Skilled Trades, etc.	26.8	23.3
14.	Unskilled Workmen, Labourers, etc.	7.3	7.8
15.	Others	6.2	6.0

<sup>1</sup> Letter from A. Kirkland to J.K. Hardie, n.d. but ?1894? The Johnson Papers, I.L.P. 4, 94/230.

<sup>2</sup> 'Higher Grade Schools', *The School Board Gazette*, Feb. 1899. Italics in original.



The association drew the same conclusion from these as socialists, namely that “the Higher Grade School is the school of the people.”<sup>1</sup>

In Woolwich most of the local I.L.P. were amongst those British socialists who rallied to support the provision of this type of secondary education to the children of the working class. When the Education Bill for London was presented in 1903 the local *Labour Journal* put its views of this, “muddlesome and pernicious” proposal which would, “confuse and retard the education of the workers of London for at least a generation” on the front page. It urged its readers to “agitate, agitate and agitate” until it was opposed to death.<sup>2</sup> In an article which, in common with many others, described these events as an ‘Education Crisis’, Mrs Bridges Adams, a socialist member of the London School Board, wrote that she, like most socialists favoured, “*absolute equality of opportunity*, and that not only primary, but secondary, technical and university education, should be within the reach of *all*, poverty in no case being a barrier.”<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Rodney Barker’s conclusion there was nothing that was “fleeting” about this socialist attachment to universal secondary education.

### **The campaign for a democratic education: socialism and the politics of education**

Such changes to the political status quo as franchise extension and the increased provision of education were usually referred to as ‘palliatives’ by the socialists of this period. There can be no doubt that socialists were keen advocates of the particular educational palliatives outlined above. However, this raises two related questions. Firstly, what was the nature of the relationship between these palliatives and the ultimate goal of the creation of the socialist co-operative commonwealth? Secondly, what was the relationship between socialists in their struggle for these reforms and other, non-socialist, political groupings engaged in similar campaigns?

In answering the former question J.J. Smyth has seen the socialist movement at the turn of the century as having a blinkered vision, limited to campaigns for palliatives which deprived the movement of a strategic view

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<sup>1</sup> National Education Association, *Save the Higher Grade School*, Special Leaflet no. 6.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Education Bill for London’ *The Labour Journal*, April 1903. Italics in original.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs Bridges Adams, ‘The Education Crisis’, *The Labour Leader*, 27 July 1901. Italics in Original.

of the advantages of full democracy let alone socialism.<sup>1</sup> In responding to this conclusion it should be noted that neither Marx, nor the socialists studied here, regarded education as a specifically socialist demand. Education would not, in itself, change the productive relationships that characterised capitalist society, the alienation that these engendered and neither would it change the structure of the state.<sup>2</sup> These strategic changes could only be obtained by political struggle. However, an educated working class was far more likely to engage in that struggle, and far more likely to win it than an uneducated mass. Even more than this it was through struggle, the struggle for universal secondary education for example, that the adults of the working class would become conscious of themselves as, in Morris's words, the agents of "the new order of things",<sup>3</sup> in other words as the class agent of humanity. Moreover, through the education thus gained they could heighten the awareness of their children.

Carpenter argued that socialism could claim authority over the people only insofar as it could justifiably claim to represent them and their true interests. In other words it must be truly democratic.<sup>4</sup> Socialism was thus synonymous with democracy. However, this did not mean that socialism could be reduced to bourgeois democracy or palliative/reforms. Carpenter did not view the existing system as benevolent. It was, on the contrary, his strong opinion, often expressed, that the existing system was a disease in the body politic. The two systems were qualitatively different. Socialist democracy, unlike the existing system, represented the realisation of the, "magnificent conception of inward and sacramental human equality".<sup>5</sup> Though he stressed the difference he did not imply that there was no connection whatsoever between the two systems. Morris called the period that he thought would come between bourgeois and social democracy the "transitional phase" and thought that it could be brought about by one of two methods. The working class would either enter into open insurrection against the state, or, it would use the opportunities presented to it by bourgeois democracy to advance as far as it could in a "long game".<sup>6</sup> This could well be trying to the patience of socialists keen to establish the new

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<sup>1</sup> See the abstract to J.J. Smyth's PhD thesis, *Labour & Socialism in Glasgow 1880-1914*.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, 'Free Education', *Justice*, 24 Oct. 1885. For Marx see, R. Small, 'Marx and State Education', *History of Education*, 1982, vol. 11, no. 3, especially page 214.

<sup>3</sup> William Morris, *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 4. Manuscript, n.d., in, The Pickles Papers, Pic/110.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal*, 52.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> William Morris, 'What is our present business as socialists?' *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1894. See also letter from William Morris to Pickles, 3 Oct. 1885, in, The Pickles Papers, Pic/37/i.

order, but given that the working class exhibited little sign of a propensity for revolt the only practicable route lay through the development of existing democracy.<sup>1</sup> The “first act of the great class war” would be marked by “the workmen ... claiming their recognition as citizens and [demanding] to be treated as such.”<sup>2</sup>

Whilst it is necessary to acknowledge differences between socialists who prioritised the quest for the long-term aim and those who contented themselves with winning palliatives, the significance of these differences within the movement can be overstated. Though the leaderships of the groups that embodied the various positions could be openly hostile towards each other it does not follow that such hostility was universal amongst the membership. The organisations concerned were often only really fixed at their core, whilst at the boundaries, in various branches and localities the membership could be fluid, drifting from one to another, or could be quite arbitrary, with all local activists joining whichever group approached them first. In either case it would be wrong to assume that the writ of the centre ran too fully in the branches of any socialist organisation of this period.

This was certainly the case in the East End of London where Harry Lowerison was, by 1891, the secretary of the biggest branch of the Fabian Society in the country which met at his home in College Street, Homerton.<sup>3</sup> Lowerison’s thought was most definitely not characterised by that form of narrow bureaucratic, elitist, managerialism which is usually associated with the Fabians. He could make a home in the Society because the Fabians were, in common with most of their contemporaries of the time, a far broader and looser grouping than may be presumed. It was loose enough in fact to accommodate Lowerison and his joint secretary George Samuels (later ‘Marxian’ of *The Labour Leader*) who described himself as, “by temperament, an Anarchist of the deepest dye.”<sup>4</sup> Samuels, together with his successor A.C.H. Graham produced a report for the East London Fabians that declared that the Society stood for the creation of “an aristocracy not of money-bags...but of heart and intellect.”<sup>5</sup> The latter category alone is

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<sup>1</sup> William Morris, *Letters on Socialism* (reprinted for T.J. Wise), letter dated 2 April 1888.

<sup>2</sup> William Morris, ‘What is our present business as socialists?’ *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1894.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the East London Groups of the Fabian Society*, March 1892. The Fabian Society Archive, F130/2.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Fabians in East London’, *East End News*, 16 Oct. 1891. The Fabian Society Archive, F130/2.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the East London Groups of the Fabian Society*, March 1892. The Fabian Society Archive, F130/2.

usually seen as Fabian orthodoxy but Lowerison sought, like Samuels, to unite the two. This drive to re-unite parts of a fractured humanity, both at the social and at the personal level to create an elevated citizenship, was the underlying principle of all Lowerison's ideas and actions. In doing this he could attract the support of other local socialist groups. The records show that Lowerison lectured at the S.D.F.'s North Kensington branch on 'The Scope of Trade Unionism'<sup>1</sup> and, in 1891, *Justice* singled Lowerison out for praise and noted that, in East London, "the best relations exist between" the Federation and the Fabians.<sup>2</sup> In 1893 these groups got together to form a socialist party to fight in the local elections.<sup>3</sup> A similar spirit of fraternity informed the actions of the I.L.P. in Woolwich. Their paper, *The Woolwich and District Labour Notes*, carried on its front page a recommendation that its readers also look at *The Clarion*, *The Labour Leader*, and *Justice*.

Even at the centre there could be a recognition of the need for both the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary wing of the movement. Morris, for instance, felt "complete tolerance"<sup>4</sup> for other strands of opinion and the organisations that propounded them and recognised their usefulness to the "general movement in this country."<sup>5</sup> He did not like the evil chicanery of parliamentarianism and sought to keep a personal distance from it, but he saw its usefulness. It may thus be possible to conclude that the strategy of electoral participation whilst keeping the socialist flame alive, was generally accepted by the broad base of the movement as a whole. This was particularly true in the field of education, where not only was there widespread agreement on the desirability of this particular palliative, it was, where school boards were fully operational, administered through the most advanced democratic machinery in the country.

*Justice* answered the rhetorical question "what ought all democrats and Social Democrats do?" in response to Government education initiatives thus, "undoubtedly they ought to accept the Government Bill, make the very best they can of it, and push the system of gratuitous instruction forward as far as they can."<sup>6</sup> This acceptance of a partial palliative did not

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<sup>1</sup> Handbill in Coll. Misc. 376.

<sup>2</sup> *Justice*, 18 April 1891. The Fabian Society Archive, F130/2.

<sup>3</sup> 'The London Groups', *Fabian News*, Oct. 1893.

<sup>4</sup> William Morris letter to Glasse, 23 May 1887, in *Unpublished Letters of William Morris*, introduced by R. Page Arnot, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> 'Free Education', *Justice*, 2 May 1891.

necessarily represent a capitulation to gradualism. Joining in a working agitation with other groups did not mean that socialists were keen to submerge their own identity and forfeit the remainder of their programme for the sake of the palliative to be gained.<sup>1</sup> Catherine Conway's *The Cry of the Children* was a forceful demand for a better life for the rising generation which demanded the full panoply of reforms linked to schools and education, (free meals and medical inspections, for example,) but which also stressed that, "our children will never know the real gladness of life or enter into its fullness till the power of landlord and capitalist to oppress is gone for ever, and their fathers and mothers are free to work together for the Commonweal and share together in the Commonwealth."<sup>2</sup>

In calling for *An Independent Labour Party* John Trevor stressed that "independence is the first thing". The workers, he wrote, needed to organise themselves to campaign for their rights and to use them when they received them. Without the moral integrity gained through this independence any gains the workers received would not help them. They would actually reduce their self-motivation even further and make them emasculated "state pensioners or paupers", dependent upon a despicable combination of ruling class philanthropy and state doles.<sup>3</sup> Morris agreed that reforms which were won by active working-class campaigning were infinitely preferable to reforms doled out in piecemeal fashion by the government. In writing particularly about an increase in educational provision he commented, "great as the gain would be, the ultimate good of it, the amount of progressive force that might be in such things would, I think, depend on *how* such reforms were done - in what spirit."<sup>4</sup> For "the programme of the workers can only be carried out by the workers themselves."<sup>5</sup> There was, he wrote, a danger of the state playing cat and mouse with socialists by accepting "the quasi-socialist machinery" but working "it for the purpose of upholding that society in a somewhat shorn condition, maybe, but a safe one" for the continuance of capitalist exploitation.<sup>6</sup> An independent working-class political presence was thus essential if the movement was not to be outflanked by its enemies. Ben

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, William Morris, 'What is our present business as socialists?' *The Labour Prophet*, Jan. 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Conway, *The Cry of the Children*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> John Trevor, *An Independent Labour Party*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> William Morris, *Communism*, 265. Italics in original.

<sup>5</sup> *The Hammersmith Socialist Record*, Dec. 1891.

<sup>6</sup> William Morris, *Communism*, 267.

Tillet argued that this was the historical lesson that the British working class needed to learn most quickly.<sup>1</sup> Even H.H. Champion, whose *Labour Elector* propounded the minority view that the whole labour programme could be obtained through Parliament as it stood, agreed on this central point of independence.<sup>2</sup> This independent presence was needed all the more in areas with a school board because of the wide franchise on which they were elected and because their electoral system allowed minorities to gain representation.

School Boards were elected on the basis of a proportional representation system whereby the voter had the same number of votes as there were seats under contest. These votes could be distributed amongst several candidates on a slate, or all of the votes could be allotted to one candidate - 'plumping'. The socialist press was always keen to explain the system to its readers fearing that any misunderstanding might deprive them of votes. In 1888 *Link* published a list advising its readers how to divide their votes where there were two socialist candidates or, who to plump for where there was only one socialist candidate. It also detailed who was entitled to vote.<sup>3</sup> In Liverpool, six years later, *The Labour Chronicle* reproduced this section of the ballot paper to show readers precisely how to vote to secure a socialist presence on the board:

Reeves, Samuel - -	8
Dodd, Charles E. -	7

Independence was seen as central to socialism in this period but the political landscape that was produced by this principle could vary from place to place. Socialists could strike up alliances (which may, as *I.L.P. News* admitted, have been "reckless and vindictive"<sup>4</sup>) with either party depending very heavily upon local circumstances and local personalities. Socialists could thus adopt any of three basic positions in educational politics. The first was hostility towards Liberal and Tory alike. The second

<sup>1</sup> See Tillet, *Trades Unionism and Socialism*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Policy of Labour III', *The Labour Elector*, 11 May 1889.

<sup>3</sup> 'Notes on the School Board Election', *Link*, 24 Nov. 1888.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Question of Policy', *I.L.P. News*, Nov. 1900.

line singled out the Tories as the main enemy and opened up the possibility of an alliance between progressives and socialists. The third position, equally single-mindedly, targeted the Liberals or radicals and, in a few cases, even led to alliances of socialists and Tories.

In Woolwich the I.L.P. advocated the first position. Its observations of municipal elections led it to conclude that politics as a three cornered fight between Liberals, Tories and labour was anachronistic. Politics, it argued, was fought out between the labour and the anti-labour candidate with many Liberals stating that they would rather vote for a Tory than a socialist.<sup>1</sup> That this is less of an observation than it is an active intervention designed to produce precisely this polarisation was made clear a year later when the paper wrote that “during a strike there are no Tories or Liberals among the workers; they are all workers. Let it be the same then at elections. Erase from your memory the words Liberal and Tory, substitute for them ‘Worker’.”<sup>2</sup> This message was echoed from Hammersmith where the local socialist newspaper argued that, “the workers have to choose between slavery, however its claims may be gilded (or galvanised more likely) and freedom, that is equality political and economic.”<sup>3</sup> This view was also held by Tom Mann of the N.A.C. of the I.L.P.. He argued that a party was needed which would “seriously damage” the party interests of both Liberals and Tories.<sup>4</sup>

The second political strand in the movement produced common alliances of a broad progressive front that singled out clerical toryism as the chief opponent.<sup>5</sup> This was exemplified by one correspondent who wrote to Keir Hardie. This anti-Tory socialist regarded it as only natural that the Great Northern Railway Company (which dominated the town of Doncaster from where he wrote) should be in cohorts with the local Tory-dominated town council to prevent the creation of a school board in order to prop up the local church school.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘How it is being done’, *Woolwich and District Labour Notes*, Dec. 1898. And, ‘Mr Will Crooks M.P. on Liberalism and Labour’, *The Labour Journal*, Sept. 1903.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Labour Representation’, *Woolwich and District Labour Notes*, Feb. 1899.

<sup>3</sup> *The Hammersmith Socialist Record*, Aug. 1892.

<sup>4</sup> Un-sourced press cutting in the first I.L.P. N.A.C. minute book. I.L.P. (1).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Graham Wallas, ‘The Educational Contest’, *Justice* 24 Nov. 1888.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from W. Scott to J. Keir Hardie, 19 May 1894. The Johnson Papers, I.L.P. 4, 94-96.

However, in entering into progressive alliances to campaign for increased educational provision socialists did not abandon their longer-term objectives. In fact the language used to attack their allies was always stronger and more bitter than that which was brought to bear on the arch-proponents of reaction. When, in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Tressell commented upon an election he described the Tories' posters as being base enough to hoodwink only the most ill-educated of the workers. However, "the Liberal posters" were a very different matter. These "were more cunning, more specious, more hypocritical and consequently more calculated to mislead and deceive the more intelligent of the voters."<sup>1</sup> From Tressell's own socialist perspective this represented a serious danger because often the least educated workers, though duped, were the poorest and therefore unenfranchised, whilst the better-educated sections of the class, the obvious target for the appeals of socialist rationalism, would be the leading members of the working-class community. Equally in Parliament socialists found that they could not trust the leaders of the Liberal Party. Tillet wrote to Burns that, "Asquith seems to hypnotise all the folks who stand up for us in the House"<sup>2</sup>, and when Hardie wrote to Burns he claimed that though some of the Liberal rank and file were quite reliable he could never apply the same judgement to their national leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The Liberal/radical danger was thus seen by this section of the movement as the more real and serious. Mahon agreed with this view,<sup>4</sup> and the S.D.F. was ever keen to berate the failure of Liberal governments to deliver their promises on education. Blatchford summed up this anti-Liberal feeling in characteristically plain language, "the Liberal party is thrice damned. It is a monstrous sham. ... It is easy to see what they love, they are hypocrites and toadies - they must go."<sup>5</sup> However, even he could not produce such venom as this from Sam Reeves in *The Labour Chronicle*.

Liberalism is neither consciously static or deliberately dynamic, but whilst content in the main to merely 'mark time' would fain persuade the world that it was making progress. It must go, quietly if it likes, if not it will be

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 541.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Ben Tillet to John Burns, 11 April 1893. The British Library Add Manu 46285 f141.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from James Keir Hardie to John Burns, 23 May 1891. The British Library Add Manu 46287 f169-170.

<sup>4</sup> J.A. Mahon, *A Plea for Socialism*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Robert Blatchford to A. Wallace, 17 July 1894. The British Library Add Manu 46440 f174.



hurled from its position 'mid the hisses of scorn and curses  
of hate from those who have been its victims.<sup>1</sup>

Examples of Liberal or progressive duplicity and unscrupulous behaviour at school board elections were often reported in the socialist press. In 1900 *The Socialist Critic* reported that the progressives in Walthamstow had set up a relief fund for widows and orphans of the Boer War just prior to the election so as to be able to cast their candidate in the warm glow of philanthropy. When, despite this hypocrisy, the electors still voted for the avowed socialist, Harry Bird, the progressives gave up trying to “blackguard” him and began “to cast the cloak of flattery”.<sup>2</sup> Two years earlier, in Blackburn, when canvassers for the progressive candidate in the school board election met a socialist supporter they cunningly mentioned that the socialists were sure of being returned and so persuaded the voter that he could, therefore, safely give some of his votes to the progressives. In 1894, E.R. Woodward of the Norwich Conservative Association wrote to Hardie demanding that the I.L.P. issue a denial of a Liberal smear that the local I.L.P. was funded by the Tories.<sup>3</sup> Hostility towards Liberals and liberalism could lead socialists to support a Tory against a Liberal candidate. This was the case at York in 1898, for example, where the I.L.P. backed Charles Beresford against the local Liberal ‘boss’ Sir Christopher Furness.<sup>4</sup>

The widely held view that reforms that were granted by the state, as opposed to those won by struggle, weakened the ability of the movement to stand up for itself explained why socialists attacked liberals or radicals so strongly since this was the quarter from which such reforms, or at least the ‘specious, cunning and hypocritical’ promises of such reforms, were (at least until the conservative volte face in 1902) most likely to emanate. This was Sam Reeves’s reasoning. Socialist tactical responses to their political rivals may have differed but they were predicated upon the same ‘spirit’ (to borrow Morris’s word) or strategic reasoning. In 1902 some socialists lost the ability to keep their broader aims in sight whilst dealing with the manoeuvrings of the government. This event, the Education Act, which saw the abolition of the school boards, marked a crucial and strategic change in the terrain of politics. For now it is necessary to repeat that,

<sup>1</sup> Sam Reeves, ‘Liberalism and Labour’, *The Labour Chronicle*, Aug. 1894.

<sup>2</sup> ‘School Board Election’, *The Socialist Critic*, 24 March 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from E.R. Woodward to James Keir Hardie, 7 Sept. 1894. The Johnson Papers, I.L.P.4 94/189.

<sup>4</sup> Howell, *British Workers and the I.L.P. 1888-1906*, 365.

whichever policy in relation to opponents and tactical positioning was adopted it was taken up on the firm basis of socialist independence, and with one eye kept on the eventual goal of the co-operative commonwealth and the other on any 'partners' in a progressive phalanx whose political timidity and propensity for treachery were almost taken as read.

### **Democratic control of education: socialism and the state**

Despite the plutocratic nature of late nineteenth century Britain<sup>1</sup> these political groupings were not equivalent to the state and so it is to the socialist view of the state as such that attention must now turn. It has already been seen, in chapter two, that socialists did not trust the actions and decisions of coroners and school inspectors. This attitude exemplifies a broader mistrust. Thus *The Socialist* was quite clear on the matter of the nature of the state which, it maintained, was set up by capitalists to further their own ends.<sup>2</sup> Carpenter saw the existence of any state as proof that man had "lost his inner and central control, and therefore must resort to an outward one. ... If each man remained in organic adhesion to the general body of his fellows no serious disharmony could occur." The root of this alienation lay in "the growth of wealth ... and the conception of private property."<sup>3</sup> *The Clarion's* socialist catechism put the same idea thus:

Q. What is the State?

A. A contrivance for the robbery of the people by means of exploitation.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless working people could alter the nature of the state itself by educated, active and controlled participation in the political arena mapped out by the state. Since they were one of the most accessible points of the state it is not surprising that it was through school boards that much of this transformative drive was channelled. Thus, whilst board school education may have been initiated as part of the great game of capitalist competition, under pressure from below it could develop into something which "its promoters did not altogether intend."<sup>5</sup> Political participation was thus

<sup>1</sup> For this opinion see, for example, Tom Mann, 'Preachers and Churches', in, Andrew Reid, ed., *Vox Clamantium*, 289.

<sup>2</sup> 'Manifesto of the Socialist Union', *The Socialist*, July 1886.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation - its cause and its cure*, 31 & 5.

<sup>4</sup> 'A Socialist Catechism', *The Clarion*, 11 June 1898.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Classes and the Masses', *The Labour Journal*, Jan. 1901.

encouraged if not expected, or indeed, demanded by socialists as it was clear that participation did not betoken acceptance of the status quo.

Graham Wallas noted the high level of devolved power in the political system of his time. "Parliament in Westminster can only sketch the outlines of social reform ... the detailed construction work must be done, either well, or badly, by the small Parliaments of the town, the county and the village."<sup>1</sup> Herbert Burrows saw that local government had the great advantage of being "at our very doors" whereas "Parliament is away in the clouds".<sup>2</sup> James Leatham viewed local government favourably pointing out how it was used in his native Aberdeen to provide good quality services. Since these were not driven by profits and because no dividends had to be paid Aberdeen Council was able not only to reduce prices, but also to grant its employees an eight hour working day. But he went beyond these Wallas-type advantages to advocate a move to socialism by means of the increased empowerment of localities, which (summoning up the powerfully emotive ghosts of Paris barely twenty years previously) he called communes. These were to operate with increased democratic control at all levels.<sup>3</sup> Morris similarly described the community of the socialist commonwealth as one which would organise its affairs locally in communes<sup>4</sup> and, following his lead, Lowerison advocated a "democratically-elected council" to run local affairs "for the happiness of the commune."<sup>5</sup>

Socialist opinion on the usefulness of local government could be divided. Though, in earlier years, it had campaigned for extensions of local power<sup>6</sup> in the later part of this period *Justice* was always very keen to make the point that municipalisation alone was not the same thing as socialism. Any division was, however, more one of degree rather than one of principle. This would remain the case until the end of the century when the issue of

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Wallas, 'The Workers and Local Bodies - Practical Suggestions', *The Labour Union Journal*, (Bradford) 26 May 1892.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Herbert Burrows to *Justice*, undated. Coll. Misc. 522 3/1, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> James Leatham, *The Only Thing That Will Do*, 21. With regard to the improvements in service that accompanied municipalisation, *The Labour Journal* reported that in Woolwich the removal of waste by direct labour cost £1,600 and the council received 35 complaints about the quality of the service. In nearby Plumsted and Eltham where the service was done under contract by private companies it cost £3,580 and the service received 142 complaints. (*The Labour Journal*, Sept. 1903.)

<sup>4</sup> William Morris, *Labour from a Socialist Standpoint*, 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Lowerison, *In England Now*, 170.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, 'Free Education', *Justice*, 24 Oct. 1885. And compare with, for example, 'Educational and Municipal Notes', *Justice*, 7 April 1900.

local democracy would be one of the fault lines on which the movement would fracture at the time of the abolition of the school boards.

Even where they were ardent advocates of local government, socialists did not simply seek to use the existing machinery of the state. They also sought, like Leatham, to make it increasingly democratic. Thus, after establishing himself as a proponent of, “transferring the business of the people to local government in order that it may be near the people”,<sup>1</sup> one author went on to add, “if socialists would largely use the state to realise their ideals, it is only because they would make the state first democratic.”<sup>2</sup> In criticising local government as the body to effect the transformation of society the S.D.F. were always keen to point out that without this growing democratisation, the same institutions could be used to increase the efficiency of exploitation. This was, of course, the case where school boards were controlled by conservatives who sought, for example, to pay less than union rates on school board contracts. These conservatives were put in these positions of power by the votes of working men and women, or by their abstentions. Increased democratisation thus entailed the education of the polity so that they should realise where their own best long-term interests lay. This, in turn, made education not only the end of power but the means of getting it.

The centrality of the link between an increased democratic base and the advocacy of local rather than national systems of government administration was made clear repeatedly in socialist discourse. The arguments were well-rehearsed in a letter to a newspaper in Leicester from ‘Proletarian’ who took issue with a local Fabian whom ‘Proletarian’ styled a ‘state socialist’.

There is a considerable difference between state socialism and true socialism ... [which] seeks to establish free communes, working on true co-operative principles ... a society of free men, a society in which Liberty, Equality and Fraternity will be realised to their fullest extent. The state socialist differs from us not only in methods, but also in aims and principle. They seek to make industry a state monopoly to be organised and managed by a hierarchy of government officials. They want to remedy monopoly by another monopoly. ... It is not by looking to government to remedy our evils, to supply our needs, and to manage our

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<sup>1</sup> W.D.P. Bliss, *Handbook of Socialism*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

affairs that we shall ever realise a better state of things; let us rather do these things *ourselves*, by education and organisation.<sup>1</sup>

The accomplishment of these goals by the workers themselves could not be achieved simply by more elections to Parliament on a wider franchise, but necessitated a whole new strategic vision of the meaning of democracy. This was centred round socialist demands for the referendum, direct legislation, and the use of delegates.

Direct legislation was hailed by Thompson of *The Clarion*, its most vocal advocate, for two reasons. Firstly, it would, “overcome the problem of those whose ancient prejudices render it impossible for them to support a socialist candidate but who would cheerfully vote for any legislative proposal that offered the prospect of alleviating human suffering.”<sup>2</sup> Secondly, if voting were to be made compulsory it would force voters, “to *think* about the laws that govern them.”<sup>3</sup> However, even Thompson “stopped short of proposing to transfer ‘the whole government of the country - finances, the question of peace ... as well as ordinary legislation in one fell swoop to the inexperienced direct control of the Democratic mass.’”<sup>4</sup>

A staunch attachment to such open, transparent, democratic and local power systems was a characteristic of, not only socialists, but also of sections of the working class. In 1900, socialists in Chelsea noted, that it was greatly to the credit of workers that when they acted on their own initiative they did so without the use of bureaucratic party machines.<sup>5</sup> In 1894 Burns wrote to Eleanor Marx with a suggestion for a planned demonstration in London at which The National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers of Great Britain and Ireland was to have a presence. She agreed with Burns’s suggestions but replied that Will Thorne, the union’s General Secretary, would not “care to act without consultation with ... the branches. You know

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to un-named Leicester newspaper, 12 May 1893. Coll. Misc. 375. Italics in original. For similar views see, for example, ‘State Socialism Again’, *Justice*, 25 Jan. 1902. ‘Collectivism Versus Social Democracy’, *Justice*, 1 Feb. 1896. ‘State Capitalism’, *Justice*, 24 July 1897. And, Edward Carpenter, *Towards Industrial Freedom*, 45.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in, Barrow & Bullock, *Democratic Ideas in the British Labour Movement 1880-1914*, 51-52. See also, *The Hammersmith Searchlight*, Feb. 1900, 3. Thus, “in inviting you to give these questions your serious consideration we are not asking you to become socialists; neither are we asking for your votes.”

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Barrow & Bullock, *Democratic Ideas in the British Labour Movement 1880-1914*, 52. Italics in Original.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in, *ibid*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> ‘We have parties without principles; why not principles without parties?’, *The Chelsea Pick and Shovel*, July 1900.

there is no 'bossing' in our union, and the branches are very jealous of their rights, and watch their officers very carefully."<sup>1</sup> Tom Mann noted a similar feeling among trade union members in Newcastle-under-Lyme where members wanted a local system to settle disputes, distrusting a regional officer, let alone the national one.<sup>2</sup>

Socialists were zealous advocates of these popular and functioning forms of direct democracy but this warmth was tempered because of their understanding of the dilemma posed to progress by an uneducated electorate. It is here, in this cautiously enthusiastic embrace of direct democracy, that one must locate the central importance of school boards as an issue for socialists of this period. School boards were elected on the broadest suffrage of their time and whilst they did not hold referenda on every matter of consequence that fell within their remit, their elections were at least contested on matters of one policy area (and a vital one in the socialist world view) which, other things being equal, afforded the electorate at least the chance to 'think' about these matters in isolation and to overcome their 'ancient prejudices'.

Thoughtful consideration of these matters and a consequent demonstration at the school board polls made manifest the maturity of the participants. It showed that they were prepared to assume the duties of citizenship and thus gave legitimacy to their demands for full citizenship. Carolyn Martyn wrote that the workers could only realise their dignity as citizens when they discharged their responsibility at the polls.<sup>3</sup> *Justice* concurred with this arguing that, "the full accomplishment of our duties is the only valid claim to the full possession of our rights."<sup>4</sup> This was especially true of elections to school boards as votes here did not hold out even the promise of any material gain for the electors themselves, but rather offered a deferred benefit for the weakest members of the community namely the children. School board elections thus afforded the people the best chance to demonstrate both their moral integrity and the rational appreciation of the future material best interests of their class. Individuals had "duties as well as rights"<sup>5</sup> and though "a vote is a sacred trust given by the community to

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Eleanor Marx Aveling to John Burns, 23 Feb. 1894. The British Museum Add Manu 46293 f137.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Tom Mann to John Burns, 31 Dec. 1887. The British Museum Add Manu 46285 f1.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Martyn, *Co-operation*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> A.S. Headingley, 'The Moral and Material Aspects of Socialism', *Justice*, 1 June 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Adams, 'The Deficiencies of Radicalism', *Seed-time*, Jan. 1895.

its members to be used for the common good”<sup>1</sup> “this duty is by no means exhausted in the act of voting”.<sup>2</sup> This was seen as the barest level of active participation socialists thought ought to be undertaken by a class seeking its own emancipation. Thus it was that Lowerison wrote that the greatest duty of all was the duty to claim one’s rights and to use them to help others.<sup>3</sup> In other words it was essential to be a socialist. This opinion was echoed by the Woolwich I.L.P. which told voters in municipal elections that, “your duty to yourselves, your wives and your children if you would be on the side of progress, prosperity and principle, is to vote for the Labour candidate.”<sup>4</sup> As Tom Mann put it, “take pleasure in the performance of your duty as an honest citizen and the result will be a hastening of that glorious time when the domination of a class shall be a matter of history, and when all shall have enough work and none shall have too much.”<sup>5</sup> Thus the local and democratic nature of school boards provided an arena where working-class people could prove their worth and vote for the moral and material advancement of their children, and this, in turn, necessitated their own moral improvement. The two were therefore indissolubly welded together through the political form of the school board election.

School board members once elected were not officially delegates, but at least some socialist members tried to try to act in a delegate-like manner, never forgetting who had, or should have had, the real power in the voter-member relationship. This was socialist best practice and it made manifest the common belief that the desired ends could never be achieved by means that were inimical to them. Socialists not only had a duty to struggle to realise the creation of the co-operative commonwealth, they were morally bound to practice as many of its features in their daily lives as was at all practicable. Consequently, when he was elected to the Walthamstow School Board, Harry Bird of the local S.D.F., kept in constant contact with his constituents through a monthly newspaper, *The Socialist Critic*, which seems to have been produced specifically for this purpose. He reported back to them on topics such as: the promotion boards for assistant teachers, the use of corporal punishment, teaching training plans, the allocation of contracts to non-union firms, teachers’ pay and conditions, the board’s

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Notes on the School Board Election’, *Link*, 24 Nov. 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Un-sourced press cutting in a scrap book in The Passfield Papers, VII 13 (ii) July 1888 - ? March 1891.

<sup>3</sup> Lowerison, *Mother Earth*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Municipal Elections: Your Duty and how to do it’, *Woolwich and District Labour Notes*, May 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Mann, ‘The Eight Hour Day’, in, John Laurent, ed., *Tom Mann: Economic and Social Writings*, 48.

decision to mark the death of Queen Victoria, and proposals to establish school medical officers and to raise the school leaving age.<sup>1</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Besides providing some kind of education for working-class children which, in certain areas, included the type of secondary education given in the higher grade schools, school boards had three very important merits for socialists. They could provide the vital training in thinking closely about single issues that general elections denied the voters. They also represented something of the half-way house that *The Clarion's* Thompson made clear was necessary before the establishment of full social democracy. They were single issue, local authorities operating the most advanced franchise in the country which could, because of their unique electoral system, give socialists an opportunity to put their democratic principles and policies into practice. This chance to alter the living conditions of the working class by means of the school boards was their third great advantage to socialists. E.P. Thompson noted that, even if they had no immediate prospect of tackling the cause of poverty, socialists could, through their use of such local government bodies as school boards, at least, try to alleviate the symptoms of poverty.<sup>2</sup> Here, specifically child-centred demands for, for example, medical inspection, free meals, and milk, could be extended to include demands for improvements in housing conditions.<sup>3</sup> It was the 'S.D.F.er' and member of Burnley town council education committee, Dan Irving who first linked the demands for state maintenance to the wider questions of child labour and the half-time system.<sup>4</sup>

It is virtually impossible to see how it could be argued that such demands could have been satisfied on the terrain of the late Victorian political landscape. Any description of these policies as mere palliatives to be gained within the existing structures of society and the state does not do justice to the far-reaching transformative nature of what was being demanded. Their realisation would require 'the death of liberal England'. It was not only through their demands for changes to the organisation of the state by means of its increased democratisation that socialists sought its

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<sup>1</sup> See, *The Socialist Critic*, from 24 March 1900 to Feb. 1901.

<sup>2</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Homage to Tom Maguire*, 286.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, 'The School Board and the Taxation of Land Values', *The Democrat*, 1 Aug. 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, 298.



radical transformation, but also through the policies they demanded be carried out. The socialist critique either of state structure, or of the parameters of policy, represented a serious threat to the hegemonic settlement. When the two came together, as they did in education policy, they could represent a force that needed containing. This containment, when it came, was signalled by the abolition of the school boards which was carried out by the 1902 Education Act.

# CHAPTER 6

## Socialism and the 1902 Education Act

A reactionary measure, and a serious set-back to the progress of free, unsectarian, and democratic education in the country.

'Children', *The Labour Annual* 1903, 101.

The Education Bill put forward by the government is by no means perfect ... but its leading principle is wholly sound.

Fred Brocklehurst, 'The Education Bill', *The Labour Leader*, 3 May 1902.

There have been numerous attempts to explain the great changes in British socialism from its early forms, in the period under review here, to those of the twentieth century. This obvious and significant change is, of course, evident in socialist education policy. Whereas in the 1880s and 1890s socialism had campaigned for a fully democratic education system, in the twentieth century, as Brian Simon has noted, the Labour Party concentrated upon access to secondary schools as they existed at the time. "From now on the pressure for secondary education for all inevitably took the form of a continuing attempt to open up the grammar schools - now the only secondary schools - to the working class."<sup>1</sup> Rodney Barker has similarly argued that the 1907 Free Places Regulations "dealt a severe (and very quickly fatal) blow to the old concentration upon the upper reaches of elementary education."<sup>2</sup>

Historians have usually linked the quick fatality of the forceful impetus generated by British socialists in the 1880s and 1890s to weaknesses in their organisation and to their ideological or analytical positions. The formal alliance of some socialists and the trades unions, cemented in the Labour Representation Committee (L.R.C.) towards the end of this period,

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*, 246.

<sup>2</sup> Rodney Barker, *Education and Politics 1900-1952. A Study of the Labour Party*, 22.

ushered in a wave of compromise by these socialists, the roots of which Pierson has located in this earlier period.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein James Hinton has noted how, the “socialism of the 1890s paved the way for the subordination of the socialist movement to trades unionism and to the new liberal revival after 1900.”<sup>2</sup> As well as drawing out the successes of the S.D.F., Martin Crick has noted that, at least, some of the blame for its failure to meet its objectives should be placed at the Federation’s own door and has singled out its poor conception of organisational theory and its decision to leave the L.R.C. here.<sup>3</sup>

There were other, external, forces which may have had a role in pushing socialism towards a centralised organisational forms and ideas. These factors included, firstly, the I.L.P. wipe-out in the 1895 election and their subsequent increased policy of cohabitation with trades union leaders. Secondly, there was the foundation of the L.R.C. and the S.D.F.’s subsequent withdrawal from it and, thirdly, the national nature of the attack on trades unionism as signalled clearly by the 1901 Taff Vale decision and the earlier national engineering lock-out of 1897-98. Emphasis on these factors pushing socialism towards a national perspective has not been misplaced, but it has been at the expense of an examination of another factor. This concerns the nature of the institutional forms taken by the state, which it will be argued had a reciprocal effect on the socialist movement. Not only do political movements effect the state, but the actual form of the state, whether it is centralised or localised, for example, can have a shaping effect on political movements.

Patrick Joyce has highlighted the importance of the organisational form assumed by socialism. It is his argument that changes in outlook should “be seen as the outcome of changes in organisation rather than the other way round.”<sup>4</sup> In his work the focus is not so much on the precise form of organisation, nor is it on the changes that these forms underwent, but on their existence as such. The fact that there was an *Independent Labour Party*, which had to justify its existence by acting independently, he argues, cut down the room for manoeuvre with the Liberals despite what he sees as the strong ideological continuities between the two.<sup>5</sup> However, Joyce’s

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<sup>1</sup> See Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists : The Journey from Fantasy to Politics*, 50.

<sup>2</sup> James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> See, Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, especially, 291-299.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 79.

work begs a question, namely if changes in organisation lead to changes in outlook, what leads to changes in organisation? The study of socialism in regard to education leads to the conclusion that changes in the educational ideals of socialism, from the espousal of local control to the championing of more centralised structures, from arguing for a fully democratic system to attempting to increase the working-class presence within elitist secondary educational provision, were not changes that came upon socialism from out of the blue. Rather they were a reformulation of existing socialist ideas, in part as a response to changes in the state. If new socialist ideas, carried forward by new organisational patterns, emerged as dominant in the new century it was partly because new political spaces had been created for them as the old spaces were shut down. This was partly, if not wholly, accomplished by the reforms in the state structure that were driven through by conservative modernisers.

In his work on the socialist movement of this period Mark Bevir has employed what was characterised, in the introduction to this thesis, as a dualist approach. This split the movement into component parts which could be viewed as detached from each other, if not indeed antagonistic. He has described one group, the Fabians, as ‘Realists’ because they accepted the “reality of political power and the need to act in order to obtain it.”<sup>1</sup> However, the study of socialist education policy has revealed the inadequacy of this description because, whatever may have pertained in other policy areas, the reality of political power in education before the 1902 Education Act was quite different to the Fabian ideal. This was the case because school boards, “the most hopeful instrument of social reform yet created by the hand of the democracy,”<sup>2</sup> created a real political space for a socialism that was open, local, and democratic. Within the pre-1902 education system, it was this type of socialism which was the mainstream and realistic view whilst it was Webb’s view that was peripheral. The marginalisation of the Webbite leadership of the Fabian Society in this period was evinced by their single-minded determination to change the existing system and roll back democratic forms in the education system in order to create a political habitat more conducive to their ends and means.

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<sup>1</sup> W.M. Bevir, *British Socialist Thought 1880-1900*, 299.

<sup>2</sup> Cutting from an unnamed newspaper in a scrapbook in the Passfield Papers, Section VIII B(i) Jan.-July 1888.

In the 1880s and 1890s the often fierce socialist moral critique of the workers carried with it the clear implication that they could be better people. This meant that they, the agents of the new religion, could become the liberators of humanity. This socialism did not presuppose the need for the state to act on behalf of the workers. Neither, as was seen in the previous chapter, was there a pivotal role for bureaucrats or ‘experts’. In this sense the doctrine of self-improvement was the doctrine of self-liberation. Although the two were not absolutely identical there was a strong correspondence between this ideal and the reality of political power in the school board system. Socialist education policy based on a unity of moral and material with its consequent focus on local and direct democratic systems was thus a fair reflection of reality.

The aim of this chapter is therefore, to assess the significance of this Act for socialist education. It will begin with an examination of the nature of the 1902 Education Act through the thinking of its prime movers, Webb, Balfour and Morant. This chapter will then move on to examine the impact of this Act on British socialism looking at how and why socialists argued both for and against the Act and then at the ideological reasons for their positions. This will show how the precise re-formulation of the state’s educational machinery enacted in 1902 was able to create ambivalences or divisions around the central items of socialist educational discourse that were outlined in the previous chapter.

## **The nature of the 1902 Act**

The close connection between Sidney Webb and his cohorts on the Fabian Society and the 1902 Act was clearly perceived and reviled by socialists. As *Justice* phrased it, “it is hardly too much to say that Balfour read up the Fabian pamphlet *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, and framed his Bill along that undoubtedly big pennyworth of infallibility.” This S.D.F. author, Frank Colebrook, continued, “after Balfour brought in the Bill, our Fabian friends drafted a long, very able, many-paragraphed ‘resolution’ which *inter alia* called Balfour’s attention to some little points in the pamphlet which he had overlooked.”<sup>1</sup> These “little points” included the abolition of the optional clause, in other words, the abolition of school boards.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Colebrook, ‘The Education Muddle, The S.D.F. Attitude’, *Justice*, 6 Sept. 1902.

Sidney Webb saw popular control, or as he put it, 'primitive democracy', as outmoded and as an obstacle on the road to national efficiency. It was his view that, by an evolutionary process, society was moving inexorably towards a differentiation of societal functions. This process could be hastened by changing the education system so that people received the type of education that would best fit the role that they had been allotted in the social order by the disinterested experts, whose role it was to solve the problems of administrative efficiency.

There was a strong strain of rationalism in the socialism of this period which could lead to exasperation with the political attitudes of the working class, but notwithstanding this, frustration did not lead to demands for less democracy. However, this was precisely the route taken by Webb. In his scheme democratic control over the system meant, not the active participation of citizens in elections to school boards, but instead the passive consent to policies formulated by experts. This was to be government **of** the people but most definitely not **by** the people. In *London Education*, for example, he argued that any local decision-making powers should be, "subject always to complete central control."<sup>1</sup> Thus it was that Colebrook described the Fabian proposals as, "the gala day of the bureaucratic expert."<sup>2</sup> He, like most other mainstream socialists, such as Edward Carpenter for example, believed firmly that government should be conducted both by **and** for the people.<sup>3</sup>

For Webb education was vital to the efficient survival of the nation and the empire in a harshly competitive international environment.<sup>4</sup> He applied his zealous advocacy of efficiency to two aspects of education, its political or administrative organisation and its operational structure. In June 1899 *Fabian News* reported that Webb had moved a resolution which encapsulated his policy for the organisational structure of British education. This can be summed up in two words, concentration and simplification. Webb was strongly opposed to the existence of what he dismissed as ad hoc bodies, that is to say single-purpose authorities for each public service. He

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Webb, *London Education*, 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Colebrook, 'The Education Muddle, The S.D.F. Attitude', *Justice*, 6 Sept. 1902.

<sup>3</sup> See Edward Carpenter, *Parties in the Labour Movement*, notes for a lecture, Feb. 1893. The Carpenter Collection, Mss 57.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Webb, *London Education*, 9.

proposed a plan which would place all local services under one elected authority with specialised administrative committees.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the actual operation of this system he gave his whole-hearted approval to the 1902 Act which reversed the school boards' progress towards a unified system of democratically controlled education. In September 1900 he wrote what he described as his longest ever letter to Graham Wallas, in which he set out his broad education policy. He plainly emphasised his opposition to what he called, "the ultra-School Board idea that the School Board should eventually do secondary education proper."<sup>2</sup> He saw the higher elementary schools as providing children not with the full secondary education that most socialists saw as necessary to produce active and critical citizens, but rather with only the narrowest vocational education leading to, "the counting house, the factory or the kitchen."<sup>3</sup>

He had actively campaigned for schooling that reflected his view of society, which was to be schooling that was functionally differentiated and hierarchical. In his view elementary schools would take the ordinary boy or girl up to the age of 14 or 15 but no further. Their function was to prepare "boys and girls, not for a higher school, but for work."<sup>4</sup> Secondary schooling was to continue until the age of 17 or 19. There would be access for the talented child from the working class through a system of scholarships, but the overall class-bias of secondary education would remain as fee-paying pupils would also be admitted to the system. The system could thus not even claim to have the redeeming feature of being wholly meritocratic. Webb thus aligned himself squarely against the idea of a common school system which was intrinsic to the democratic socialist movement, proposing instead a differentiated school system producing, "in all populous centres ... a number of specialised schools each more accurately fitting the needs of a particular section of children."<sup>5</sup> His view was very much more akin to that of Bellamy than that of Morris. Thus Ernest E. Hunter, in an editorial in *Justice*, could conclude that, "the Bill is

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Education Debate', *Fabian News*, June 1899. See also, 'The Education Bill', *Fabian News*, June 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas 6 Sept. 1900. The Wallas Papers, 1/25 (17).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Sidney Webb, quoted in Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*, 204-6.

admittedly a bad one; it only needed the blessing of the Fabian Society to damn it entirely.”<sup>1</sup>

In his introduction of the Bill into the House of Commons, Balfour argued strongly for the eradication of the electoral control over education hitherto expressed through the school boards, and seemed to agree with Webb that the best ‘experts’ in the country should be exempt from such democratic devices. In a reference to the, “best educational elements in the country” he argued that, “they will not have to go through this elaborate electoral process, or not necessarily; and we shall be able for our educational needs to reach strata of experts not now accessible”.<sup>2</sup> In histories such as McCann’s<sup>3</sup> Webb’s desire to use ‘experts’ is portrayed favourably as being part of a much needed modernisation drive for national efficiency. However, where Balfour was concerned, any such reasoning would be wholly inappropriate. His ‘experts’ were to be “representatives of universities, of higher education in all its forms, who cannot, from the nature of the case, submit themselves to the laborious tests of a school board election.”<sup>4</sup> Any modernisation of education was thus given a very highly conservative turn by those with the power to effect the changes. These ‘experts’ were not impartial since they were the educators of one class being asked to pass judgement upon the provision of this vital service to another. Moreover, these groups, particularly the grammar schools, were, as socialists widely recognised, institutionally hostile to school board provision of higher elementary education since this was de-facto secondary education and as such threatened their market. This was the basis upon which the Rev. R. Roberts thundered his opposition to school board abolition.

Let it be known throughout the land that these schools of the people are to be destroyed in the interests of the classes. Headmasters of the grammar schools see their high fees, their autocratic power, their narrow class and professional interests threatened by these splendid schools. Therefore the judgement has gone forth that they must be destroyed. Not content with making it difficult for the poor worker to get his daily bread, this new and portentous trade union of grammar-school masters would now rob the worker’s child

<sup>1</sup> Ernest E. Hunter, ‘The Nonconformist Conscience and Education’, *Justice*, 1 Nov. 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Brehony, ‘Popular Control or control by experts? Schooling between 1880 and 1902’, in, Mary Langan and Bill Schwartz, eds., *Crises in the British State 1880-1930*, 261.

<sup>3</sup> W.P. McCann, *Trade Unionist, Co-operative and Socialist Organisations in Relation to Popular Education 1870-1902*,.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*.



of the very bread of life. That is the whole meaning of this long and shameful attack on the people's schools.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Robert Morant, the main architect of the 1902 Act, may be regarded as a very radical but extremely conservative moderniser. He was highly elitist but possessed sufficient strategic vision to recognise that managed root and branch reform of central aspects of the relationship between the state and society was essential in order to maintain the rule of the governing elites. Education was central to this platform since, not only did the country need a new breed of leaders and administrators, properly educated in order to meet the demands of imperialist rivalries, but the lower orders also needed to be taught to recognise both these figures of authority and their own inferiority to them in order to encourage deferential compliance.

In the midst of the innumerable new steps taken every year, is not the only hope for the continued existence of a democratic state to be found in an increasing recognition, by the democracy, of the increasing need of voluntarily submitting the impulses of the many ignorant to the guidance and control of the few wise, and thus to the willing establishment and maintenance, by the democracy, of special expert governors or guides or leaders? <sup>2</sup>

### **Socialist relations with other groups opposed to the 1902 Act**

Throughout this thesis attention has been drawn to how, in the policy area of education, socialists in the 1880s and 90s acted in ways that defy the common description of the movement as sectarian. The leaderships of the various socialist groups may have conducted their dealings with each other in the most unfraternal of ways, but at local level, where the power in the education system lay before 1902, ordinary socialists pursued very similar, if not the same, policies whatever their organisational affiliation, and these shared aims led to shared endeavours that transcended party. The 1902 Act was, however, not a local decision. It was an act of the national Parliament which affected all the country. It required a national response and a national campaign of the type that the national leaderships were unwilling or unable to provide.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. R. Roberts, 'The People's Schools', *The Labour Leader*, 5 Jan. 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Morant, quoted in, B.M. Allen, *Sir Robert Morant*, 126.

The S.D.F. issued a powerful manifesto against the 1902 Act.

Instead, however, of perfecting direct popular control, the Government is seeking to abolish it altogether. The educational authority in the towns is to be a mainly self-appointed committee, and in the rural districts a committee appointed by the County Council, composed of parsons and squires having the least possible interest in the education of the children of the people, except to make them more humble and obedient wage-slaves.<sup>1</sup>

However, the national leadership found itself unable to make common cause with other groups with whom it shared a desire to defend school boards. These groups included feminists, the Liberals and their non-conformist constituency, and trade unionists. Socialist relations with each of these will now be considered.

Women had been politically enfranchised by the 1870 Act which allowed them to sit on school boards and gave them the vote if they were rate-payers. The 1902 Act was, therefore, a retrograde step and was rightly viewed as such by women's groups such as the Women's Local Government Society. In the Society's *Memorandum on Some Points in The Education Bill*, published in May 1901, the group raised two fundamental objections to the measure. The first was that women would be excluded from office on educational committees because they were prevented from holding positions on County and County Borough Councils. Secondly, that any woman who was co-opted onto the committees would be there as a second-class member since she would necessarily lack a democratic mandate. The memorandum highlighted the good work of women on boards, and pointed out that The Royal Commission on Secondary Education accepted that the education of girls suffered where women were absent from education policy-making institutions.<sup>2</sup>

There was much here that was, potentially, common-ground with socialist opponents of the measure and, indeed, there were individuals within the socialist movement who, at this time, also had a foot in the feminist camp. Christabel Pankhurst, for example, wrote an article in *The Labour Leader* putting forward the 'woman's point of view' on the Education Bill. She argued that by removing the vote from women the Bill was "degrading their

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<sup>1</sup> The Executive Council of the S.D.F., 'The Education Muddle and the Way Out, Manifesto of the S.D.F.', *Justice*, 11 Oct. 1902.

<sup>2</sup> The Women's Local Government Society, *Memorandum on Some Points in the Education Bill*. Coll. Misc. 375.

position in society”<sup>1</sup> which would have the effect of injuring the interests of women teachers and pupils. However, the movement’s leadership tended to view feminism as a middle-class phenomena and, therefore, their attachment to feminism was, at best, equivocal and at worst non-existent.<sup>2</sup> Despite the Federation’s implacable hostility to the 1902 Act these other considerations seem to have been over-riding. *Justice*, made no mention of the activities of these groups.

The National Education Association was founded in 1889 by Lyulph Stanley and was an active participant in the campaign to destroy the 1902 Act. As with the Women's Local Government Society a search of the pages of *Justice* has revealed no mention of this organisation nor of its work against the Act. The N.E.A. included prominent Liberals and non-conformists on its council and the national leadership of the S.D.F. would countenance no dealings with these groups. Edward Hartley saw the fact that parsons wanted to defend school boards as itself virtually sufficient reason for socialists to attack them. “Let socialists also consider who are their allies in the fight for direct elective bodies - the parson of every sect and creed whose narrowing influence has been so full of ban for 30 years ... we can’t be too careful.”<sup>3</sup>

The Liberals, *Justice* argued, were either merely using education as a political ploy, a device to rally the liberal unionists in the government back to the old cause, “a last frantic attempt to unite on a common basis,”<sup>4</sup> or they were defending school boards on narrowly partisan, not highly principled, grounds, as they had been the creation of a Liberal administration. Thus, the Federation’s manifesto implored, “fellow workers [to] turn a deaf ear to the cries of contending religious factions!”<sup>5</sup> The N.E.A. argued that the Higher Grade School “is the School of the People”,<sup>6</sup> and presented the statistics detailed in chapter five (above) that bore out this conclusion. Thus there was, in essence, no space whatsoever between its position on the Act and that of the Federation. However, based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Christabel Pankhurst, ‘The Education Bill - the woman’s point of view’, *The Labour Leader*, 31 May 1902.

<sup>2</sup> See, Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists, the S.D.F. and the Woman Question 1884-1911*.

<sup>3</sup> Edward R. Hartley, ‘School Board or Education Committee?’, *The Clarion*, 21 March 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest E. Hunter, ‘The Non-Conformist Conscience and Education’, *Justice*, 1 Nov. 1902.

<sup>5</sup> The Executive Council of The S.D.F., ‘The Education Muddle and the Way Out, Manifesto of The S.D.F.’, *Justice*, 11 Oct. 1902.

<sup>6</sup> The National Education Association, *Save the Higher Grade School Special Leaflet number 6 - Who Uses Higher Grade Schools?* Coll. Misc. 375.

animosity prevalent between socialists and liberals in campaigns at school board elections, the Federation's leaders did not trust the long-term educational policy aims of either liberals or the non-conformists and so refused to co-operate with them. Given the active hostility of many liberals to the proposed changes in 1902 it must be seen that the Federation's national leadership let pass an opportunity to construct a broad social movement against the Act. This conclusion is strengthened by the S.D.F.'s refusal to co-operate with trades unions.

The Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. carried out an energetic campaign against the legislation. This too received scant mention in *Justice*. In part this may have been due to the highly critical view of unions held by sections of the federation's leadership which in turn was probably heightened by the close co-operation between the T.U.C. and the Liberals in opposing the Bill. In the years up to the 1906 General Election the T.U.C. continued to harass candidates who had not pledged themselves to change the measures introduced in 1902 and so played a part in the Liberal electoral triumph.<sup>1</sup>

It was much easier for trade unionists to campaign against the 1902 Act because their aims in education were much more straightforward and unanimity came far more easily to them than it did to socialists. Unions accepted the competitive basis of education and were, by the early twentieth century, content to campaign for better access within a competitive structure for gifted children from working-class homes. Socialist policy was, by contrast, far more wide-ranging.<sup>2</sup> It was this breadth of interests that allowed this legislation to lead to the crucial splits within the movement which will now be examined.

### **The Socialist response to the 1902 Act**

In 1902 socialists were required to respond to an initiative from forces at work within the political elite and the state which was simultaneously both modernising and conservative. This measure, the 1902 Education Act, was qualitatively different from the various educational measures that governments had put forward throughout the period which, in pedagogic

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney Barker, *Education and Politics 1900-1952. A Study of the Labour Party*, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Clive Griggs, *The Trades Union Congress and the Struggle for Education, 1868-1925*, 20.

terms, could be progressive and which were implemented through the established democratic school boards where they existed. The 1902 initiative placed socialists very much on the back foot since it cast them, uniquely for British socialists at this point in history, as the defenders of the existing structures of the state. Conventional histories of the socialism of this period have underestimated the disorientation caused to the movement by the need to respond to the Conservative government's educational package. This Bill was so disruptive of socialism because it was presented as progress. It was drafted by Webb, who although widely reviled as a statist bureaucrat, only socialist by name, nonetheless led an organisation which contained many mainstream socialists of the time such as Lowerison. The Bill thus represented a radical, yet deeply conservative, reformation of the state through the deployment of what Morris called 'quasi-socialist' machinery or language. The seriousness of the issues raised by the 1902 Education Act for socialism can be seen in the deep splits that it produced in the movement around terms that the movement thought it had defined in a cut and dried way.

These splits have hitherto been analysed in terms of parties or groups. Simon has noted the I.L.P.'s lack of mobilisation against the Bill.<sup>1</sup> This view is shared by Bullock and Barrow who have written of the "I.L.P.'s lukewarmness" at the time of the Bill's passage.<sup>2</sup> The Fabian Society's endorsement of the Bill has been repeated many times as has the S.D.F.'s opposition to it.<sup>3</sup> In reality the splits in the socialist movement were far more serious than this as they ran not along party lines but rather cut across them. Some of the I.L.P. leadership came out in favour of the Bill whilst others argued against it. The same was also true within the Fabian Society. Indeed within the same branch of the I.L.P. there could <sup>be</sup> staunch supporters of both camps. Moreover, the S.D.F. was not unanimously opposed to the Act, Hartley, for example, came out as one of its socialist supporters. In order to appreciate the full significance of the 1902 Education Act it is necessary to examine the nature of these schisms.

One of the weaknesses often associated with socialists of this period was their supposedly naive faith in the inevitability of evolutionary progress

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*, 234-235.

<sup>2</sup> Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement*, 153.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*, 225-235. And, Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement*, 147-153.

towards socialism. It would be a mistake not to draw attention to this aspect of socialism in the period, but it is equally unhelpful to de-contextualise it. When this belief is examined in the context of education policy before 1902 it will be seen that it is less naive than if it is viewed in abstraction.

Socialists saw themselves as presenting society with the only rational way forward and they also saw strong evidence that society was increasingly accepting their reasoning. This reasoning argued for the adoption of progressive teaching within a free and secular system that encompassed secondary education and school-based welfare provision, all of which was to be democratically controlled by the people. In many real cases, though socialists never controlled a board, this agenda was actually being advanced with local democratic bodies, school boards, implementing democratic policies such as the inauguration of de-facto secondary education through higher grade schools. In this respect the content of socialist school board election addresses throughout the 1880s and 1890s had, by 1902, come to bear a strong resemblance to the day-to-day reality of the best of the British education system.

If, since the turn of the century, socialism has come to be associated with central planning and the central state this is because the central state has assumed an importance in society which it did not have in 1880s and 1890s. Socialists did not assume that the evolution of society would occur without a struggle, and in fact struggled mightily for free school books, for example, but even so there was a socialist belief in society's evolution towards the preferred decentralised and democratic model. This idea of progression was captured by Daniel McCulloch who wrote that humanity, "has always been growing, advancing, and doubtless it is this same 'inventive' faculty ... that is destined yet to conduct the world to freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Writing under the pseudonym of 'The Dominie', Lowerison applied this evolutionary discourse to the education system. He described the education system set up by the first codes as a, "dead, brute, machine-made system" which "cramped the energies and clipped the wings of teacher and taught alike" but which had, by the time of his writing, in 1895, been "improved, modified and humanised."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the field of education, with its local

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel McCulloch, 'Education, what it is and what it should be', *The Commonweal*, 19 Jan. 1889.

<sup>2</sup> The Dominie, 'The New Code', *The Clarion*, 13 April 1895.

and democratic machinery making at least some progress towards a democratic education system, this belief in evolutionary progress may not have been totally misplaced in the 1880s and early 1890s. The important point is that this belief hardly prepared socialists to face the serious challenges posed by the 1902 Education Act since this belief encouraged some in the movement to find points within the framework of the Bill with which they could connect.

The 1902 Education Act thus split socialists into two camps, its defenders and its critics. Those representatives of the movement who supported the Act whose reasoning will be examined here are, Fred Brocklehurst, Robert Bentley (R.B.) Suthers, Edward Robertshaw (E.R.) Hartley, and a regular contributor to the Woolwich I.L.P.'s newspaper known only by the pseudonym 'Persona'. Brocklehurst was one of the leading socialist supporters of the 1902 Education Act. At various times in the 1890s he was an I.L.P. branch officer, member of the Party's central N.A.C., member of the Manchester School Board, and a Parliamentary candidate. Suthers was a member of staff at *The Clarion* who came into his own after 1901 when he became the in-house writer on the important subject of municipal affairs. He wrote several books and pamphlets on this subject, one of which, *Mind Your Own Business*, was still in print as late as 1938. Hartley was a member of both the I.L.P. and the S.D.F. though he gave most of his political energy to the latter organisation. He was on the Federation's executive for seven years, chaired its Bradford conference in 1907, and fought parliamentary elections for the S.D.F. five times between 1895 and 1913.

Between them they defended the Act in three ways, firstly, it was maintained that the Act would establish a democratic system of control over education, secondly, it was argued that the legislation provided a universal, or national education system, and, thirdly, they suggested that the Act would deliver a pedagogic advance. In other words three long-established socialist principles would be used but the manner of their use would, in each case, divorce the moral focus of socialism from its material concerns and so pave the way for a changed form of the ideology, with a different organisational structure, to emerge and prosper.

With regard to the first of these lines of defence Brocklehurst maintained that the Act was actually more democratic than its critics believed. On this

point it is worth noting, since it reveals much of the character of the new system, that even an ardent supporter such as Brocklehurst only stated its democratic advantages in conditional language. In an article entitled *Recent Democratic Legislation*, he wrote that the Education Act **could** lead to an educational ladder from “the gutter to the University”, **if** it were “interpreted in a liberal spirit.”<sup>1</sup> He further added that input of democratically accountable educational officials and managers would be only “indirect”.

Hartley viewed the Act with a mixture of fatalism, administrative optimism, and practical concern for poor children. In an article in *The Clarion*,<sup>2</sup> he wrote that the government seemed determined to starve the boards of funds and to do away with the control of education by elected bodies. Moreover, he added, school boards did not operate all over the country and, even where they did exist, progressive boards were in a minority. Socialists were, therefore, left with a simple choice. This was either to fight a rearguard action for the next ten years, during which time they would have abandoned their commitment to the current generation of children, or to accept the provision of education by councils and work within the new system to the benefit of the children. He clearly favoured the latter choice. Hartley was heavily involved in the Cinderella movement in Bradford which, in 1902-3, fed 1350 children per day and would, in the depression years of 1903-4, be part of a vociferous local campaign for free school meals. No-one could doubt his commitment to the cause of poor children. However, his arguments in relation to the 1902 Act went beyond the necessity to get involved in the institutions of the state, whatever their form, to press for vital reforms. With regard to this Act he also argued that the new system was, in fact, democratic. Turnout for board elections was, he maintained, low, whereas for a multi-purpose authority it would be higher. Again, like Brocklehurst, his view was more concerned with the quantity of democracy than its quality. More votes meant more democracy.

These points were all answered by Stewart Headlam in a long and detailed rebuttal that took up more than half of the front page of *The Clarion*. The new system would not be democratic, he wrote, as the people would cede their direct electoral control to county councils which would only be

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘Recent Democratic Legislation’, *The Co-operative Wholesale Society Annual 1904*, 199-200. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Edward R. Hartley, ‘School Board or Education Committee?’ *The Clarion*, 21 March 1902.



responsible for appointing half plus one of the members of education committees.

The people are plainly told that they are not fit to manage their own educational affairs: that there are superfine people who will not offer themselves for election, but who are too good to be lost. Demos is 'off'; the young gentleman at the Bureau is to take his place. ... It is an open attack on the democratic principle.<sup>1</sup>

He also criticised the “much talked of ladder to university”,<sup>2</sup> arguing that what was needed was not a ladder to take a few to the top, but a “broad staircase” to convey the many one stage further along by giving them a secondary education.<sup>3</sup>

Headlam also pointed out that although the new system might meet the first of Webb's two watchwords, concentration, it did not guarantee that the second of these, simplification, would apply to the administration of the new system, far from it.

See what havoc this vicious arrangement must work for education. First there is the council which has to raise the money, but which may neither control nor manage the schools; then there is the committee which is to control but not manage; and then there is are the managers, who alone are likely to get interested in the work, but will have no power to vote a single penny for its maintenance.<sup>4</sup>

He saw a future ahead for the education of the people's children in which their best interests would be lost amid bureaucratic confusion and departmental infighting. All of this, he added, would be brought into being by, “an unholy alliance between the bureaucrats and certain ecclesiastics - between Mr Webb, of the Fabian Society, who welcomes the Bill as epoch-making ... and the Dean of St Paul's ... who says that school boards have lowered the tone of morality.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1905, in *Mind Your Own Business*, Suthers wrote that,  
 we say that the way to encourage the development of Self-Reliance and Responsibility, the way to breed men of Character, is not by closing up nearly all the avenues along which the people may exercise their energies, ... not by depriving them of their rights and duties as citizens, but by

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart Headlam, 'The Education Bill', *The Clarion*, 23 May 1902.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

widening their opportunities of exercising their intelligence and thinking powers, by insisting on their responsibility as citizens.<sup>1</sup>

All of which reads very much like one of A.M. Thompson's arguments for direct democracy from the 1890s and would have made an excellent passage to cite in defence of the school board principle. However, at the time of the Act's passage, Suthers had actually argued in favour of the legislation. Writing in *The Clarion* he was keen to emphasise that, "the Bill does one thing that all educationalists have clamoured for - it appoints *one* authority for education."<sup>2</sup> Here he stressed the second defence of the Act, the universal, national nature of the system it created. He begged "to be informed by the experts who may write letters to *The Clarion* about this Bill what there is undemocratic in the new arrangement."<sup>3</sup> Fred Brocklehurst took a very similar view.

Brocklehurst's attitude to the 1902 Act serves to highlight the way this legislation split socialism. In 1894 he had been a vocal advocate of all the commonly accepted elements of the socialist movement's education programme. In a series of articles in *The Labour Leader* he argued for a decrease in the size of classes, a reduction in the amount of book-based learning and homework, and a commensurate rise in the use of practical lessons and field trips. He also sought the abolition of the half-time system, an increase in the school-leaving age, more technical education, secular teacher training colleges, and the end of the pupil teacher system.<sup>4</sup> However, in 1902, he did not address the effects of the Education Act on any of these points and supported it on the basis of what he saw as its democratic credentials. In common with the Fabian Society which published a generally supportive *Manifesto On The Education Bill*,<sup>5</sup> Brocklehurst argued that though the democratic provisions of the Bill were not perfect it must be supported.

He argued that the Act greatly extended the scope of democratic control by bringing under public scrutiny schools which had hitherto been beyond it. Socialists had long argued that a really democratic education could only be

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. Suthers, *Mind Your Own Business - the Case for Municipal Management*, 171.

<sup>2</sup> R.B. Suthers, 'The Education Bill', *The Clarion*, 4 April 1902. Italics in original.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, 'Educational Reform parts I-IV', *The Labour Leader*, 8 Aug. 1894. 29 Sept. 1894. 13 Oct. 1894. 27 Oct. 1894.

<sup>5</sup> See, *The Labour Leader*, 16 May 1902.

delivered to the people if the people controlled the means of its delivery and further that all the people deserved such treatment. They therefore demanded the universal provision of democratic education by democratic means. Brocklehurst saw in the Education Bill a system that was universal and chose to emphasise this scope of provision rather than its quality. He wrote that the big advantage of this measure was that, “it unifies the educational authority and with it the educational system. ... Implacable opposition to a Bill which for the first time in England confers ... elements of public control over the Voluntary schools shows neither wisdom nor statesmanship.”<sup>1</sup>

Brocklehurst thus justified his stance by arguing that the Bill seemed to hold out the promise of achieving some of the socialist movement’s long-cherished educational policy aims. It appeared to bring forward a settlement of the religious question and to hold out the prospect of an advance to that universal system of compulsory progressive education up to the age of 14 or 15 for which all socialists had tirelessly campaigned.<sup>2</sup> Brocklehurst argued that through the re-organisation planned,

we should secure the unification of our present system of primary education, link it indissolubly in the corpus of the new authority with our gradually evolving secondary system and at the same time lift all educational questions beyond the battle-field now occupied by conflicting sects and warring theologies.<sup>3</sup>

On the occasion of his Parliamentary candidacy at Bolton in 1895 Brocklehurst declared himself to be in favour of legislation to effect “**Free Unsectarian Education** from the lowest Elementary school to the Highest University, and which shall be free from Religious tests both in school and training college.”<sup>4</sup> This demand for secular education, was of course, central to the socialist view of a democratic education. Seven years later he argued that, though the 1902 Act did not deliver this demand in its entirety it went, “a very long way towards it.”<sup>5</sup> Before the Act, he argued, the polity paid for the voluntary schools but had no control over them. After the Act

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘The Education Bill’, *The Manchester Evening News*, 14 April 1902. Coll. Misc. 522.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Education Bill’, *The Labour Leader*, 12 April, 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘The New Education Bill, good points and bad’, *The Labour Leader*, 18 April 1896.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Fred Brocklehurst’s Election Manifesto for the Parliamentary Election’, *Bolton and District Independent Labour Pioneer*, July 1895. Emphasis and capitals in original.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘The Education Bill’, *The Manchester Evening News*, 14 April 1902. Coll. Misc. 522.

the community would exercise meaningful, albeit not total, control over these institutions. The deeply divisive nature of this Act is highlighted here by the fact that in 1895 Brocklehurst was not prepared to accept any compromise on this issue. “Denominationalists must pay for denominational teaching and no further financial burdens must be placed upon the national shoulders for the support of privately managed schools. Stated in other words, public control must accompany public payments, and no friend of education will be content with less.”<sup>1</sup> The democratic rhetoric of the 1902 Act softened his position thus allowing him to justify a volte face on this issue.

In an article in *The Leicester Pioneer* Gould summed up both sides of the debate and then drew his own conclusions. The Education Bill, he wrote, had the positive feature of, “bringing elementary schools and secondary schools under one management”.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it created the basis for common school system. However, he added, this was only a basis and did “not go far enough. The Bill makes a trembling hop instead of a splendid flying leap.”<sup>3</sup> Though the Bill’s democratic credentials were deficient in this respect, Gould saw that they had at least one advantage in that the town council as a general purpose authority was far less likely to be the province of ‘experts’ than the specialised school board. This was a line of reasoning unique to Gould, and probably reflected his low opinion of the quality of debate on the Leicester School Board. Notwithstanding this democratic claim in favour of the Bill, Gould concluded that, “the structure of the Bill is utterly bad, and no democrat ought to vote for it.” It was “ridiculous in its pretence of popular control” and he lamented the exclusion of women from the new education authorities.<sup>4</sup> In place of this fundamentally flawed piece of legislation Gould proposed the familiar socialist package of free universal education that was secular in content.<sup>5</sup>

Gould’s opposition was echoed by many others. Philip Snowden, for example, argued that the provisions of the Bill would not create a unified system since it gave power over some schools to religious denominations and thus created, at least, two systems of management. Moreover, any co-

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘The Education Controversy’, *The Labour Leader*, 2 Nov. 1895.

<sup>2</sup> F. J. Gould, ‘The Government’s Education Bill. Opinions for and against’, *The Leicester Pioneer*, 10 May 1902. The F.J. Gould Papers, 10D 68/9.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

ordination of the system would be achieved through a system that “betrays a distrust of popular control and of popular education.”<sup>1</sup> Ramsey MacDonald supported this by stating that unification of educational administration was utopian and dangerous. It was utopian because the subject was so important and so complex that no single authority could ever hope to deal with it. The project was dangerous because it would increase the power of unelected bureaucrats and the co-opted members of committees and thus further remove power from the people.<sup>2</sup>

A Church School teacher, writing in *The Labour Leader*, emphasised the fact that the Act would not create a universal system as it would leave teachers and pupils alike at the mercy of religious tests.

If the clerics say ‘we provide the schools’ - which in the majority of cases they do not - ‘and we desire religious instruction on our lines’, then let *them* give it. They have no right to impose a religious test on any person paid out of public funds. ... let us debar them from using public funds for the propagation of their own pet dogmas.<sup>3</sup>

This writer argued that education had to combine a democratic system of political control with a democratic syllabus delivered in the classroom. The remarkable change in Brocklehurst’s focus, by 1902, on the former element of this coupling is an example of how this legislation allowed the divorce of the moral and the material.

The third argument with which some socialists defended the Act concerned matters of the curriculum. One such socialist was ‘Persona’. This writer condemned the Act as an advance in the administrative scope of democracy rather than an advance in the quality of democracy because it was to be implemented at the expense of the more direct style of democracy inherent in the school boards.<sup>4</sup> In so doing this writer was in line with the rest of the Woolwich I.L.P.. Notwithstanding this reasoning Persona parted company with the rest of the branch and argued that what really mattered was what went on in classrooms and this would be improved overall by the measures contained in the Bill, since it would eradicate the boards which had proved themselves to be, at best, slow and reluctant advocates of, and at worst

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Snowden, ‘The Education Bill: A Reply’, *The Labour Leader*, 19 April 1902.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ramsey MacDonald, ‘The Education Bill’, *The Labour Leader*, 26 April 1902.

<sup>3</sup> A Church School Teacher, ‘The Education Bill’, *The Labour Leader*, 24 May 1902. Italics in original.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Independent Labour Party’, *The Labour Journal*, Sept. 1902.

plainly hostile to, the new ‘natural’ child-centred pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the writer concluded the Education Bill should be supported.

Though socialists, such as Lowerison and Gould, had long been uncompromising critics of the type of education delivered by the boards, (in fact Gould had resigned and Lowerison had been sacked from the London School Board over just this issue) they had supported the boards themselves. Socialist support for boards had thus never been uncritical. However, it is important to realise that this criticism had been of the policies pursued by some boards and of the type of education they delivered, rather than of the principle of direct democratic control of education by the people. This was one of the many points clearly made by Stewart Headlam, he stated that the boards, “are still young, they have made their mistakes and learnt by them ... they have accumulated an amount of experience and knowledge which only those who are hostile to education would want to get rid of.” Adding that the Bill “is a straight, direct blow against Democracy.”<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the power of socialist pedagogic critiques and the attachment of socialists like Lowerison and Gould to a vision of a better education should not be underestimated. Thus it is hardly surprising that some looked at the 1902 Act and saw the prospect of pedagogic evolution. These socialists argued that the Education Act seemed to offer a solution of sorts to issues of the curriculum and methodology by bringing the church schools, “where methods of instruction are years behind the times and where religious and orthodox instruction take up a large part of the school curriculum,”<sup>3</sup> under the same authority as the rest and so promising to level up standards across the whole country.

Against this others in the movement pointed out that school boards ran teacher certification classes which allowed intelligent working-class children to become teachers. The Bill made no provision for such classes to continue and so handed the control of classrooms and school children over to the middle-class teacher.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, by effectively maintaining the managerial control of clerics over ‘their’ schools the Bill proposed giving

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<sup>1</sup> ‘A Glance at the Educational Problem’, *The Labour Journal*, Dec. 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart Headlam, ‘The Education Bill’, *The Clarion*, 23 May 1902.

<sup>3</sup> P.H. Bird, ‘War on Education’, *The Labour Leader*, 28 April 1900.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. R. Roberts, ‘The People’s Schools’, *The Labour Leader*, 5 Jan. 1901.

them the power to appoint teachers, who would be paid from public funds, only after such staff had passed a religious test.<sup>1</sup> Neither of these provisions seemed to be designed to bring forward the type of teachers that socialists had long argued were essential if children were to be educated effectively. Philip Snowden further attacked the idea that the Bill would ‘level up’ the system across the country by improving the voluntary schools. He argued that what was more likely to occur was that the good standards of the board schools would be dragged down by the dead-weight of clerical lassitude, which would thus effect a levelling down of classroom practice. It would be far better, he argued, to allow the voluntary schools to fade away under increasing competition from the boards.<sup>2</sup>

Socialists who supported the 1902 Education Act did not recognise a major revision in conservative thinking from one of the type of out-and-out reaction, so ably characterised by Diggle’s ‘ratepayer’ parsimony, to one that sought to appropriate the language and certain political mechanisms of the socialists or progressives, in order to modernise the country and yet still maintain a deeply conservative distribution of educational resources. E.H.H. Green has described this reformed conservatism as based upon the acceptance of social reforms as long as they could be designed and implemented in a way that did not “rob henroosts” dear to Tory hearts.<sup>3</sup> With regards to the format of welfare provision this is undeniably true. However, the study of education, which is not central to Green’s work, shows another side to this conservative strategy as advanced by Morant and Balfour, namely that it was to be implemented through a state shorn of any democratic trappings that it had acquired.

The advocates of this new model conservatism, such as J.L. Garvin, argued that those within traditional Tory ranks who raised their hands up in horror at the thought of conservatives initiating welfare reforms were “wrong in thinking that social reform ... is the same thing as socialism ... they may be as opposite as bane and antidote.”<sup>4</sup> This was, of course, particularly true when social reform was carried out by bodies that actually pushed back democratic progress. That some socialists were unaware that social reform could have different meanings for different people can be partly explained

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<sup>1</sup> A Church School Teacher, ‘The Education Bill’, *The Labour Leader*, 24 May 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Snowden, ‘The Education Bill: A Reply’, *The Labour Leader*, 19 April 1902.

<sup>3</sup> E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism, - the politics, economics and ideology of the Conservative party in Britain 1880-1914*, 261.

<sup>4</sup> J.L. Garvin, quoted in, *ibid*, 260.

by the rationalism of socialism. Before 1902, this rationalism has focused upon attempts to improve the critical awareness of the citizenry within an open and democratic education policy-making system. The change in this system to one that was elitist and far less democratic (both in pedagogic and political terms) uncoupled socialist rationalism from democratic claims. Henceforward the dominant use of rationalist language within socialism would be of a Webbite style and would be used, therefore, to justify the empowerment of bureaucratic experts.

Another contributory factor in this lack of awareness was the prevailing mood of belief in the inevitability of social and democratic progress which blinded socialist defenders of the 1902 Act to the nature of the conservative outflanking manoeuvre under way. In 1901 Stewart Headlam broke ranks with his Fabian colleagues to denounce their advocacy of the Bill. In a letter to *Justice*, he wrote, “it is sometimes said too glibly that ‘the democracy never goes back’” and went on to show how “if the Government’s Education Bill is carried this will no longer be true”.<sup>1</sup> Not all his comrades shared his insight.

Brocklehurst, for example clearly believed that the forward march of education and democracy was still under way. Buoyed by what seemed to be the adoption of elements of the socialist education platform Brocklehurst assumed that an increase in the number of schools covered by public control was a democratic advance since the county councils were democratic bodies. In 1896 Brocklehurst wrote that, “a system of education outside popular control is a menace to freedom and progress of the nation.”<sup>2</sup> In 1902 when the movement found itself in the unprecedented position of defending the structure of the state from an attack by conservatives some socialists seemed to confuse conservative reform with progress and, to use Garvin’s words, swallowed the bane not the antidote. This was the failure to heed Morris’s warning about the state adopting quasi-socialist machinery for its own ends.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in, Barrow & Bullock, *Democratic Ideas in the British Labour Movement 1880-1914*, 148.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Brocklehurst, ‘The New Education Bill: Sins of Omission: Suggested Remedies’, *The Labour Leader*, 25 April 1896.



## **Conclusion**

The cession of control over popular education to what Morant styled, “the blind impulses of mere numerical majorities”<sup>1</sup> had never been the intention of the 1870 Act. Elections to school boards were a late addition to the Bill designed to appease the nonconformist interests, and these elections were initially designed so as to be as inaccessible to the ordinary working person as possible. However, the ensuing years saw a dramatic rise in the power and organisational abilities of the urban working class and socialist movement, who saw their opportunity and seized it. This local power was the door to a democratic education leading to meaningful citizenship that Morant and those like him were determined to close again. Twenty years before their abolition *The Labour Standard* perceived the hostility of the ruling class towards the school boards and all they stood for and believed that they were “tolerated” simply because they could not be “effaced”.<sup>2</sup> By 1902 changing circumstances meant that the ruling elites could no longer tolerate the boards and set out to liquidate them.

The abolition of the school boards thus signalled an important re-drawing of the terrain of the politics of education which came to favour centralised and national organisations and, therefore, crucially de-stabilised the decentralised and democratic socialism that had dominated the movement. Rather than encouraging people to come to terms with their own democratic potential the new state institutional forms of education, and the organisational structures to which they gave a fillip, increased the power of experts and ‘the young gentleman at the bureau’. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s socialists had demanded that all people be educated. This demand would now be met. However, through the manner in which this policy was implemented the people would be politically impoverished by their position as the recipients of welfare, rather than empowered as a confident citizenry who had found the moral strength of purpose to demand, obtain and administer their own education as a democratic duty to society. Moreover, the education they received would come to them in a rigidly class-based format and be delivered by a system within which they had little or no real power, and no chance of reforming save by entering into highly centralised political formations that were far removed from direct democratic control. In other words, after 1902 if socialists sought to change education they would have to divorce ends and means and approach reform

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<sup>1</sup> Morant, quoted in, B.M. Allen, *Sir Robert Morant*, 126.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Earl Spencer on Education’, *The Labour Standard*, 8 Oct. 1881.

through organisational forms that were anathema to mainstream socialism in the 1880s and 1890s.

# Conclusion

For education means development, it means the creation of conditions that will afford the fullest opportunity to all mankind for the due cultivation of our manhood and womanhood. Instead of drudges, loafers and swindlers, it would make men and women - a somewhat truer and higher ideal than the making of money.

Daniel McCulloch, 'Education: What it is and what it should be'. *The Commonweal*, 19 Jan. 1889.

The 1880s and 1890s was a period when education was high on the political agenda of most groupings in British politics, and one in which socialists were able to carve out their own distinctive educational message. Socialists constantly argued for both an increase in the amount, and an improvement in the quality of education for the working class. The latter element of this programme, namely matters relating to the curriculum and classroom practice, were typical examples of what historians such as David Howell, Patrick Joyce, Stanley Pierson and Mark Bevir, have described as 'moral' or 'ethical' whilst the former section, ideas on educational provision, have usually been labelled 'political' or 'material'. The study of socialist thinking on education in the period reviewed here argues strongly for the end of this anachronistic dualism and insists that the union of the material and the moral be recognised as a prominent feature of socialist theory at the time. The education that was proposed by socialists, which has been detailed in chapters three, four and five, provided an advanced course of study, within a democratic system of equal access that was democratically controlled. Education in these terms would heighten the workers' sense of their own moral worth and, therefore, gave them the potential to achieve the aim of political power.

Therefore, within this socialist movement it was only a minority, such as the Webbs, who sought to provide an education system which might be used to create an alternative, more efficient, version of capitalism. A far more common view, held both by socialists whose contribution has been recognised, such as Morris, and by those who have forgotten, such as Gould and Lowerison, was that education was central to a challenge to the whole moral and material basis of the system. This socialism constantly stressed

that its educational aim was the actualisation of real, meaningful individuality. Socialism demanded that a comparison be made between the competitive individualism of late nineteenth century capitalism, which established a handful of winners and a multitude of losers, and the real needs, moral and material, of the great mass of the people whose individuality could only find expression in a social context. In so doing socialism launched a frontal assault on liberalism's claim to represent and enhance the true nature of individuality and thus distanced itself from, rather than associated itself with radicals.

Socialists saw an overlap of the people's moral and material needs and this was based on a recognition of the unity of moral and material in forming the society against which they railed. Their analysis of the prevailing social system, therefore, did not seek its nexus solely in the realm of economic science. Socialists did not accept the established economic orthodoxies which maintained that capitalism was a natural and superior mode of organisation for social life, and neither did they accept that capitalist economics constricted socialist agitation. Rather they saw the system as being facilitated by a reciprocal interplay between moral choices made by individuals and the economic milieu. Tactically, the horizons of opportunity and quality of life of ordinary people could be extended or limited by these choices and, indeed, the ultimate strategic individual moral choice between collusion with, or opposition to the system would be instrumental in its collapse. By accepting a reciprocity between moral and material, holding that, in other words, the system was, in part, the product of a series of moral choices, socialists saw it as being the preferred option of a group of people. This moral language was thus intensely political since it plainly identified its opponents, such as flogging schoolmasters, scamping builders on school board contracts, boards that paid below trade union rates for work on school buildings, or, the abusers of child labour. Together with the economic and political system of which they were part, these were made the targets of rationalist appeals and damning critiques. Socialists did not accept that there were a priori reasons why middle-class people could not become socialists, but the existence of socialist critiques of these groups should alert one to the fact that despite this, socialists were aware that such Paulian conversions were very rare indeed.

The centrality of morality to all forms of education in Britain must be beyond dispute. Within socialism this notion of moral improvement was

incomprehensible without notions of material betterment and democratic advance to which it was dissoluble welded. It is this union which differentiates this socialist reasoning from that of its liberal/radical contemporaries. It was this feature that also separated the socialism of the 1880s and 1890s from its successors whether they are they social democratic or Marxist. These, both in terms of policy and ideology, have focused on the material improvement of society and have largely abandoned the language of morality which, as environmental determinism became the only accepted discourse on the left, was appropriated by the right. This political development, in turn, has fed back into historiographical perceptions.

The historiography that has grown out of these two traditions has often been teleological and has proffered a distorted view of late nineteenth century socialist morality based upon an anachronistic transfer of late twentieth century political attitudes to this period. Although, when considering the twentieth century, one can safely follow Hinton<sup>1</sup> in assuming that the use of a surfeit of moralising by any of the established leaders of the working class usually represents a deficit of real radicalism, it is necessary to part company from his wider conclusion and acknowledge, that in the late nineteenth century, this was not the case. Lowerison and Gould were two examples that make this point. In the twentieth century both men drifted away from socialism but continued to use much of the same moral terminology. Lowerison used Ruskin School's motto of 'Justice and Gentleness' as the basis of rabid demands for retaliation against the Germans in the First World War<sup>2</sup>, whilst Gould kept up his secularism but applied it to the services of the positivist religion. In both cases the same moral tone assumed very different meanings. However, the point is precisely that there was a difference between its use in the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries. It is wholly inappropriate to judge the religion of socialism by what its language came to mean, or by what its one-time adherents ended up believing. Rather this morality and the reasons for its interconnection with demands for material reform and democratisation in the 1880s and 1890s merit analysis in their own right. Such an analysis cannot be brought forward by any of the models customarily deployed. It is important to study not what one imagines socialists of the time ought to have been saying and doing, but rather what they actually said and did.

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<sup>1</sup> James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism, A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974*, 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> Lowerison, 'Bruges', *The Clarion*, 13 Nov. 1914.

It may be claimed that the socialist use of moral language and moralist analysis in tandem with a material view was unique to the area of education and that, with respect of other policy areas, the two were, as many commentaries maintain, separate. In response to any such claim it is necessary to highlight two features of socialist thinking on education. Firstly, in this period socialists did not see education as a discreet policy area. It was intimately connected to a range of other issues such as child labour, welfare, the family and religion. Therefore, when one accepts that socialist education did not fit into the easy compartments traditionally employed by historians of the period one is bound to ask whether such compartments are really applicable with regard to any aspect of the movement. Education was absolutely central to socialist considerations of other policy areas, not least because it was through the school boards that socialists proposed to implement so many of their other welfare policies for children which were collectively known as 'State Maintenance'. This centrality is the second reason why one should realise that the study of socialist education can, indeed, have more wide-reaching repercussions for the historiography of the movement.

In the 1880s and 1890s the provision of education was both the means of getting power and one of the most important end uses of that power. Though socialists accepted the broad parameters of the best parts of the existing system they did not fetishise the state. They agitated powerfully and consistently within this political space to make the system more democratic, both in its institutional structures, and in the nature of the education it provided. Since there was a close correlation in the minds of socialists between education and democracy no other position was possible. Similarly, where they existed, democratically elected school boards were both the means of struggle and, insofar as they represented an open, local and accountable structure, the end aim of the envisaged co-operative commonwealth. The local board gave political room to minority groups such as socialists to get elected and to try to effect the reforms of the system that were close to their heart. If enough local electors could be convinced of the rationality of the socialist case a difference could be made locally, and relatively quickly, thus allowing people to see and reap the rewards of their moral strength displayed by an exercise of their democratic duties.

The settlement enshrined in the 1902 Education Act removed these possibilities and bolstered those within the movement, such as the Fabian

leadership, who sought materialistic and elitist solutions through Parliament or committees. The removal of the local and democratic alternative left the way ahead open for this form of socialism to prosper. The demand would henceforward be that the opportunity to study what, in the 1880s and 1890s, was derided as 'the dead vocables' of the classical-type education system be extended to as many working-class children as possible. In a democratic system, the bones of which existed before 1902, power and status can potentially, at least, go to the majority in society. It was to accelerate further this transfer of power that socialists argued so consistently for an increase in the provision of high quality, compulsory secondary education of the type delivered through board schools to the working class. The 1902 settlement reversed all progress along this route. It made the status accorded by education, and therefore the socially-recognised moral worth that status entails, the preserve of the middle-class minority in society. Socialists, who accepted the 1902 settlement and who, therefore, demanded this type of education for the children of the working class, gave de-facto acceptance to this system and so became accomplices in recognising the moral worth of this education and the type of society it fostered. It was in this way that the 1902 Education Act effectively enabled the severance of the moral and the material within socialist discourse on education.

The ethical code of the religion of humanity continues to retain several powerful echoes in today's world. These include, among others, for example, a passionate concern for the natural world and access to it, an easy-going fraternal egalitarianism, a distrust of bureaucratic experts and desire for co-operation through grass-roots networks rather than under hierarchical organisations. The influence of this ethical code can also be felt in progressive beliefs that, rather than a minute specialisation of knowledge, the best way for individuals to develop is through a well-rounded education which ought, also, to develop their latent creativity. However, if these principles are not to be enrolled in support of an altogether different project it has to be remembered that for the late nineteenth century socialist these points of personal development, important though they were, were not ends in themselves, but were part of a wider movement to transform the material and political basis of society. It is when the two become separated that one is left with either, an anachronistic historical perspective, or, when these terms are appropriated by politicians seeking the imprimatur of precedent, vacuous rhetoric.

The fact that the type of socialism studied in this thesis was increasingly consigned to the periphery after 1902 did not mean that it suffered a quick fatality. When it is acknowledged that this socialism was based on a strong desire for systems of direct democratic control its spirit can be seen many movements through the twentieth century, from Guild Socialism and Syndicalism to school strikes, all of which can be seen to fulfil the real need for control and active involvement that was the cornerstone of socialism in the 1880s and 1890s. At the same time its absence has been felt throughout the century. The over-reliance upon Parliamentary solutions to educational problems has produced waves of backlashes against what has been portrayed as the tyranny of faceless 'experts'. The efficacy or suitability of these educational initiatives is not at issue here. However, what must be acknowledged is that their implementation over the heads of the people made it far easier for any failures to be seized upon by reactionaries than would have been the case if education policy had obtained the active consent and legitimation of a school board election, which was the case before 1902, when the ends and means of socialism were in tandem. What was important then was not simply the existence of palliatives, such as free school meals, but rather that they were actively fought for and won, rather than doled out as a favour from the state. The existence of a local, democratic institutional structure enabled this to occur. Abolition, in 1902, thus severed the unity not only of the moral and material, but also that of the ends and means of socialism, and thus removed the control of education, and hence one of the most important means of liberation, from the hands of the people and placed it in the charge of remote national figures and cohorts of 'experts'.

Although recent governments have seen fit to push back educational provision it is still true to say that many elements of the socialist educational programme from the 1880s and 1890s have since become commonplace features of the system. It is clear, therefore, that late nineteenth century socialism did have some lasting influence on British education. This can be seen at four levels. Firstly, it shaped the labour movement's broad demands for access to education, it gave this a coherence and linked it to a wide range of claims for welfare. Secondly, it helped form perceptions of the nature of a good education as one that focused on drawing out, rather than cramming in, and which was humane to pupils and teachers alike. Thirdly, it actually educated children either in total, in such cases as Lowerison's Ruskin School, or, in part in the case of



the Cinderella and socialist Sunday schools, where Gould's works were widely used. Lastly, it secured significant milestone victories in the struggle for palliative reforms in areas such as free books.

It is probably in the last of these four areas that the influence of socialist pioneers can be seen at its most tangible. However, there can be little doubt that socialists of the last century would be not be too happy about the system within which these palliatives are currently located. They would doubtless criticise the presence of religion on the syllabus, the existence of private schools, the lack of a meaningful sense of morality in much educational provision, cuts in expenditure and the introduction of fees, and, above all, the centralisation and commensurate absence of direct democratic control of the education system. Thus, when it comes to any attempt to evaluate their lasting contribution to education one has to recognise the intimate interrelation between these material reforms and the quest for a new morality that lay at the heart of late nineteenth century socialism.

# Bibliography

The bibliography is divided into these sections:

1. Primary material

- I) unpublished material and manuscripts
- II) interviews
- III) government papers
- IV) newspapers and journals
- V) books and pamphlets

2. Secondary material

- I) theses
- II) books

The place of publication in all cases is London unless otherwise stated.

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## **IV) newspapers and journals**

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